The Munich Conference (September 1938)

THE PATH TOWARDS THE DESTRUCTURING OF DEMOCRACY IN EUROPE

MILITARY PUBLISHING HOUSE

Institute for Political Studies of Defense
and Military History

Institute of History of the Academy
of Sciences of the Czech Republic

Embassy of the Czech Republic in Bucharest

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The Munich Agreement (1938), as Viewed by Czech and Romanian Experts

This book is the fruit of the cooperation between the Institute for Political Studies of Defense and Military History, the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic and the Czech Embassy in Romania. From the very beginning, I would like to mention that the Czech Embassy in Romania and His Excellency Jiří Šitler have played an essential role in launching this cooperation between Romanian and Czech experts.

At the beginning, the Czech Embassy in Bucharest organized an exhibition dedicated to General Heliodor Píka, former military attaché to Bucharest and a good friend of Romanians, supporter of Romania's rights at the Paris Peace Conference of 1946-1947. On display at the Military Club in Bucharest, the exhibition drew the attention of the Romanian public, who thus had the opportunity to learn interesting and exciting facts about the cooperation between Czechoslovakia and Romania during the interwar period. It must be said that, during those years, the relations between the two countries were very close, as they – together with Yugoslavia – formed the Little Entente, a political and military defensive alliance designed to preserve the status quo in Central Europe.

This was followed by the round table "The Munich Agreement – the Path towards the Destructuring of Democracy in Europe", which was organized by the three aforementioned institutes and which took place at the Palace of Parliament

in Bucharest, "Avram Iancu" Hall, on September 23, 2013. It was honored by the presence of the President of the Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, Milan Štěch, of the President of the Romanian Senate, Crin Antonescu, and of the state secretary for Defense Policy and Planning from the Ministry of National Defense, Sebastian Huluban.

The participants also had the opportunity to view the exhibition dedicated to General Heliodor Píka, whose personality was evoked during the manifestation.

The round table represented a good occasion to debate the "Munich episode", which represented, as we know, an important milestone on the path towards the outbreak of the Second World War. This volume, which primarily brings together the papers presented during the round table, deepens the analysis of the event from multiple perspectives. The Czech experts bring very interesting elements regarding the foreign policy of Czechoslovakia in the 1930s, the Romanian-Czechoslovak collaboration within the Little Entente, the Soviet military potential and the potential passing of Soviet troops through Poland and Romania on the way to Czechoslovakia in case of war with Germany, the evolution of the Czechoslovak army in the aftermath of the "Munich episode", its repudiation in the post-war period, etc.

At their turn, the Romanian historians bring into discussion the coordinates of Romania's foreign policy during the third decade of the 20th century, the controversial issue of allowing the Soviet troops to pass through Romanian territory on the way to Czechoslovakia at the end of 1938, the Munich crisis as seen by Romanian military attachés from various capitals, the alternatives in the Romanian foreign policy in the period following the Munich Conference, the coordinates of the Romanian foreign policy between the Munich Agreement and the guarantees granted to Romania by France and Britain on

April 13, 1949, following the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia in the previous month.

The "Munich episode" deserves to be analyzed not only from a historical perspective, namely from the way in which the events unfolded, but also from the perspective of its long-term consequences. It inaugurated a new paradigm in international relations – "about us, without us", as ambassador Jiří Šitler correctly asserted –, which was repeatedly put to use during the Second World War and in the post-war period. To exemplify, one can mention the agreements of 1939-1940 between the Soviet Union and Germany, those between the major actors of the United Nations at the end of WW2, a number of episodes in the bipolar confrontation during the Cold War years and even afterwards, etc.

And, of course, we could ask ourselves whether the "Munich episode" from three quarters of a century ago does not have any connotations in recent events, such as the "Ukrainian crisis" of late 2013 and early 2014, for which there is no end in sight. From this perspective, the use at the highest political level of the comparison of current events with the "Munich episode" of 1938 is, therefore, significant.

We would like to express our conviction that this monograph, through the information it brings in the scientific circles and through the points of view expressed by Czech and Romanian researchers, will be useful not only for experts, but also for all those interested in the history of the previous century. The Munich Agreements remains an important, yet very unfortunate turning point for Czechoslovakia, for Romania and for the fate of the entire international system.

We would also like to express our gratitude to ambassador Jiří Šitler and to the staff of the Czech Embassy in Bucharest for the excellent scientific cooperation with the Institute for Political Studies of Defense and Military History. Also, we

were honored to collaborate with the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, an institute of great scientific prestige in Europe. We are hoping to continue this cooperation in the benefit of both institutes, a cooperation that should be facilitated by the friendly relations developed over the years by the two peoples.

Major General (ret.) PhD, Mihail E. Ionescu
Director of the Institute for Political
Studies of Defense and Military History

Inspiring International Cooperation between the Czech Republic and Romania to Mark the 75th Anniversary of Signing the Munich Conference and the Outstanding Personality of General Heliodor Píka

Anniversaries of important events connected with major moments in European and global history still rank among the ever hot topics addressing experts in humanities and repeatedly raise a number of urgent questions. Researchers meet at international conferences and seminars to present the results of their work and discuss the further orientation of mutual cooperation. Such meetings provide valuable stimuli to a further development of particular branches of science and, beside establishing scientific and personal contacts, usually produce new publications and/or studies.

An excellent opportunity of positive research work confrontation was the meeting of Czech and Romanian historians devoted to the 75th anniversary of signing the Munich Agreement and to the memory of General Heliodor Píka that was held in Bucharest in September 2013. The meeting was held under the auspices of the Senate of Romania, the Senate of the Czech Republic, the Institute for Political Studies of Defense and Military History, and the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic. All members got acquainted with the latest results of research into the period of unfreedom in the two countries and discussed a number of urgent problems and questions that in international light acquired a totally different appearance. The particular topics were then written down in the form of book chapters so as to make it possible for them to arrive in the hands of professional (as well as general) public. Contributors from the Institute of History of

the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic were outstanding historians, namely Dr. Jindřich Dejmek, Dr. Jan Němeček, Dr. Emil Voráček and Dr. Zlatica Zudová-Lešková, who specialize in and intensely deal with the foreign-political questions of the 20th century, particularly the Munich Agreement, the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, and related events caused by the Second World War.

Thus, the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, in cooperation with Romanian scientific research workers of the Institute for Political Studies of Defense and Military History, was a co-organizer not only of the abovementioned conference, but also of the present scientific monograph. The Institute of History forms part of a network of scientific, research, and university institutions, both inside the country and abroad, and deals with basic research into Czech, Czechoslovak and general history. It ranks among the leading international research institutions dealing systematically with the past of the Czech and/or Czechoslovak state within the period of its historical existence and in its departments in Prague, Brno and České Budějovice employs a number of outstanding specialists in history and in related disciplines. The professional reflection of the past and the role of historiography in maintaining national memory and forming national identity and culture in the broad multicultural meaning of the term is an indispensable part of civilized society and helps develop positive value standards, and through analytical and critical discourses provides the necessary feedback of both professional and general public.

In addition to basic research the Institute also focuses on applying research results in practice and on storing and updating the data files (bibliographic database) and specialized collections. In its Publishing Department scientific monographs as well as several historiographic journals are published, such the multidisciplinary Český časopis historický (The Czech Historical Review, founded in 1895) and Slovanský přehled (Review

for the History of Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe), founded in 1898, currently published together with Slovanské historické studie/The Slavonic Historical Studies) that provide publishing space to both the domestic and foreign scientific community; Slovanský přehled concentrates primarily on the history of Central and Southeastern Europe, including the Czech-Romanian relations.

In view of the above facts the cooperation of the Institute of History with specialists abroad, both in Europe and overseas, is of great importance. The cooperation takes place at many levels: participation in international, mainly Central European bilateral and collective projects, work in joint committees and other platforms of scientific cooperation, cooperation on particular thematic tasks within the research program, organization of international events, etc. In this way domestic research is confronted with the trends in European science, which is an excellent stimulus to the growth of scientific excellence that is so needed for its role in the international research space.

The Institute of History experts contribute to international scientific cooperation with their research on central and bilateral topics that are of interest to both current researchers and to general public (such as political and diplomatic history of the 20th century based on sources from recently opened or in the past inaccessible archives, namely those in Russia and in Great Britain). The large interest of European countries in cooperation on the 20th century conflict topics fosters the research in these particular fields.

Hence, the history of Romania within the historical Czech- and Czechoslovak-Romanian relations constitutes an important part of the problems studied in the Institute of History mostly since the early 1990s. The Institute houses the Czech National Committee of Balkanologists that was established in the late 1960s bearing initially the name of Czechoslovak Committee of Balkanologists (since 1993 Czech National Committee of Balkanologists). Its main task consists in maintain-

ing contacts with the Association internationale d´Etudes du Sud-Est Européen – AIESEE that organizes world congresses of balkanology. The National Committee also coordinates the research activities of Czech balkanologists, i.e., specialists in a number of scientific branches related to the Balkans and/or to the whole area of Southeastern Europe. The Committee periodically organizes symposia of Czech balkanologists that are often attended by foreign specialists. The leading personalities of current Czech balkanology are Dr. Ladislav Hladký at the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic and Dr. Miroslav Tejchman, emeritus worker of the Institute of History.

In the recent past, the period of late 1930s and early 1940s was very difficult for both Romania and Czechoslovakia. Historians, therefore, and particularly those who deal with balkanology, increasingly focus on this particular topic. During the Munich Crisis of September 1938 the Romanian public openly expressed sympathy with and support of Czechoslovakia, and so did also some important Romanian representatives, democratically oriented newspapers and some political parties. After the occupation of what had remained of Czechoslovakia by Nazi Germany on 15 March 1939 some ten thousand Czechoslovaks fled to Romania. Although the mutual diplomatic relations were interrupted after that event, Heliodor Píka stayed in Bucharest and in 1940 organized the Czechoslovak intelligence activities in the Balkans.

Thus, the common European past provides Romanian and Czech scientific workers with new challenges of mutual cooperation, which is honestly appreciated by the Czech side.

Prof. PhDr., Eva Semotanová, DrSc.
Director, Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic

OPENING SPEECHES (REMARKS)

MILAN ŠTĚCH
President of the Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic

Your excellency, Mr. President of the Romanian Senate, Distinguished members of the academic community, I am honored to speak at today's conference and I would like to express my gratitude for being offered this opportunity. Among other things, because its central theme essentially concerns my country.

But not exclusively. The Munich agreement and its direct consequences have influenced the whole world on a scale so large that the historical research of these events is far from being over. Therefore, it is the right choice that especially Europe does not intend to abandon this theme nor to forget.

It should never forget because it will expose herself to the major risk of similar future crises. Certainly, we do not want the old saying that warns the uneducated from repeating their own dark past to come true.

I am not a historian and I do not intend to intrude on this difficult profession, but I beg you to allow me to make a few personal observations.

In the 20th century, the world experienced numerous turning points and transformations. In the fields of science, technology and economy – but also in leadership and administration, politics and also in what social instability is concerned – great leaps have been made.

On one hand, their mutual influence allowed the emergence of important values, but, on the other hand, led to con-

fusion and uncertainty in people's minds, which always constitutes a fertile ground for false prophets – the heralds of absolute truths or of simple solutions for complicated problems.

The first half of the previous century, especially, gave the humanity a number of extreme doctrines, including the worst of all – Nazism. The expansionism of National Socialism knew no borders and the subsequent fight against it was a strenuous battle for the essence of the human civilization.

The Second World War represented a real fracture in development. Probably, if humanity had proven able of learning the lessons of the First World War, the world would not have known such a monstrosity.

But again, we have to deal with the familiar "if"…

However, this did not happen and, quite the opposite, many people, regardless of their social class, believed that one can negotiate with this evil. Or that one can attempt at least to use it for its own advantage. The consequence was the appeasement policy and the Munich agreement, which meant the senseless sacrifice of Czechoslovakia, the strengthening of Hitler's military might and the nurturing of his global ambitions.

The consequences are known and we should never lose sight of them. We must continue researching – in a professional and unbiased manner – all the possible ramifications of these events. But, most importantly, we have to look with all our strength for ways of making sure that we will never have to confront ourselves with a similar episode again.

Thank you for your attention and I wish you success.

CRIN ANTONESCU
President of the Romanian Senate

Mr. President of the Czech Republic, ladies and gentlemen ambassadors, your excellencies, distinguished guests from the Czech Republic, it is both an honor and a pleasure for me today to open, together with our guest of honor, Mr. President Milan Štěch, this extremely important – and significant – meeting. His Excellency claims that he is not a historian, but he did make a number of references to the dimensions of historic events and the importance of historical memory. I am not a historian either, although I graduated the Faculty of History and I now take the opportunity to greet with great respect and joy Professor Scurtu, one of my great teachers from my faculty years, but I feel compelled to repeat what our distinguished guest had said earlier.

We study, we research and we debate these crucial moments in order to better understand them and to fulfill what I consider to be our duty to defend democracy, normality and peace in every day and every moment of our lives. Me and President Milan Štěch – like so many of you here – belong to a generation who, after going through a lot, had the fortunate illusion, perhaps in the early 1990s, of what has been famously dubbed as "the end of history, the paradisiacal end, the happy end of history".

Then we found that things are different, that we have lived and live, in Europe and elsewhere, dramatic times that were unthinkable just years ago, even if we take into consideration former Yugoslavia, and, on the basis of these experiences, of

the illusions and disillusions, I think it is our duty, of each and every one of us – scientists, politicians, decision makers, diplomats – to always return – with our research, meditation and conclusions – to these dramatic events. Bringing us closer to our Czech and Polish friends are the extremely difficult moments of the 20th century, a century which will always accompany us throughout our lives with its enormous tragedies, tremendous successes and hopes. In this sense, we must evoke a few episodes – 1938, 1945 and, a more recent one that some of us experienced – 1968, extraordinary moments for our countries, for the relations between the two and for their consequences.

Much has been written about Munich 1938, much has been debated and commented, but it is far from being an exhausted subject. It is not a closed case as it shows us, in this moment, that mature decision makers – and even mature and developed nations – can sometimes go wrong, paving the way to terrible tragedies. It certainly does not hurt to try to always remember this and to try to prevent, through all our acts, such events from happening again.

I am grateful to our guest for being here, I am grateful to the organizers of this meeting and, with all my respect and from all my heart, I thank all of you for your presence and I wish that both the content and the conclusions of this round table will be beneficial for everyone present.

JIŘÍ ŠITLER, PhDr.
Ambassador of the Czech Republic in Bucharest

Dear Mr. President of the Romanian Senate, Dear Mr. President of the Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, Dear colleagues and members of the diplomatic corps, Dear Mr. State Secretary Sebastian Huluban, Dear General Mihail Ionescu and organizers of the round table, Distinguished audience.

I am honored to have the opportunity to take part in this round table, organized by the Institute for Political Studies of Defense and Military History, Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of Czech Republic and Embassy of the Czech Republic in order to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Munich conference.

The Munich agreement of 1938, through its role for the Czech people and its impact on the subsequent European and international developments, constitutes an especially important topic, now, when historians from all over the world try to tackle the issues related to the outbreak of the Second World War as impartially as possible. Today, the Munich conference is still being perceived by the Czech public opinion as a tragic key moment in contemporary history, when a crucial decision was taken "about us without us" regarding the fate of Czechoslovakia.

Romania's government remained neutral and, as a consequence, the Little Entente fell apart. On the other hand, the Romanian public opinion and a number of prominent political

and cultural figures publicly manifested their solidarity with Czechoslovakia. In 1938, through the voice of King Carol II, Romania refused to take part in the partition of Czechoslovakia, to which it had been invited by the Polish foreign minister on October 18, 1938, making it the only neighboring country that had no territorial claims.

In the wake of the Munich conference, the dissolution of the Little Entente, the disintegration of Czechoslovakia, the establishment of the so-called Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia in March 1939 and Romania's subsequent pro-German course, the relations between the two states were damaged.

Despite all these, after the creation of the Protectorate and the outbreak of the Second World War, Romania had a favorable attitude towards the Czechoslovak refugees, including towards the soldiers who fled through Romania in order to fight against Nazi Germany. An important role in this regard was played by General Heliodor Píka, former military attaché of Czechoslovakia to Romania, who, in this capacity, organized the passing through Romania of Czech soldiers and refugees. General Píka stayed in Romania until the middle of October 1940, when he was arrested by the Iron Guard on October 12 and threatened to be shot. He was eventually saved by the Romanian police and by an Undersecretary from the Ministry of Interior, who helped him and seven other persons to flee to Turkey. However, all his possessions were confiscated and disposed of by the Guard. In Istanbul, General Píka contacted the Soviet intelligence organs and, following the agreement with the Czechoslovak government in exile of April 22, 1941, he left for the Soviet Union as the military and political envoy of the Czechoslovak government. At the conferences that took place after the war, General Píka, together with other Czechoslovak delegates, tried unsuccessfully to convince the allies not

to treat Romania as a defeated power. After the communist coup of February 1948, Píka was released from the army and, in December 1948, he was accused of treason, murder, abuse of power and was sentenced to death by hanging in 1949. General Píka was rehabilitated and exonerated on December 13, 1968, and in 1992 he was promoted posthumously to the rank of Army General for his contribution to the Foreign Affairs Service of the Czechoslovak Republic.

I am glad that this round table is organized by Romania, a country who showed sensitivity when the fate of Czechoslovakia was decided in the aforementioned manner of "about us without us". Also, I am glad that it is accompanied by the exhibition dedicated to General Heliodor Píka, the first victim of the crimes committed by the Czechoslovak communist regime, recipient of numerous Romanian awards and medals, a democrat and true friend of Romania.The exhibition was organized by the Second World War Memorial from the village of Hrabyně, within the Silesian Museum.

I wish success both to the Round Table "The Munich Conference – the Path towards the Destructuring of Democracy in Europe" and to the exhibition "Heliodor Píka – the military attaché of Czechoslovakia to Romania".

Thank you for your attention.

SEBASTIAN HULUBAN
State Secretary for Defense Policy and Planning,
Ministry of National Defense

Mr. President Milan Štěch, president of the Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, Mr. President Crin Antonescu, president of the Romanian Senate, Your Excellency, ambassador Jiří Šitler, Dear guests from the Czech Republic, Ladies and gentlemen, I feel deeply honored to take part in the evocation of such a major event, which has marked, through its military and political implications, the history of Czechoslovakia – and of Europe, too – in such an ill-fated manner.

After the national revolutions of 1918, when the oppressed nations from the major multinational empires established independent and sovereign states, Czechoslovakia was the most advanced democracy in Central Europe, at the same time being Romania's most loyal and steadfast ally.

At the beginning of the interwar period, the long-standing collaboration between the leaders of the Romanian, Czech, Serbian and Croatian national movements from the years of World War I deepened and extended, with the aim of preserving the political order established through the Paris Peace Conference (1919). Therefore, in 1920-1921, the Little Entente was created, a defensive political-military alliance which brought together Romania, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. From a historical perspective, the cooperation between the three states was excellent, representing a regional model. For Romania, the rapports with Czechoslovakia, at that time a neighboring state,

were even more significant, as its industry was a major supplier of arms, covering 70% of the needs.

That is why Romania had a vital interest in preserving the territorial integrity of Czechoslovakia, offering in the following period a strong and multilateral support to the Czech and Slovak peoples.

Distinguished audience,

On September 29, 2013, the world marks 75 years since the "Munich Agreement", an event which ended the Versailles system and allowed Germany to annex the Sudetenland and, subsequently, in march 1939, to dismantle Czechoslovakia. These events are well-known to historians, but I am confident this roundtable will bring new details regarding this issue of major European and global interest.

That is why I shall try to refrain myself from going into too much detail. I shall only emphasize that the reunion in Munich of the leaders of the four major European powers represented the final act from a long series of errors and crises in the European security system (Abyssinia Crisis of 1935-1936, Rhineland Crisis of 1936, the Anschluss of 1938), which were de facto caused by the appeasement policy promoted by France and Britain – the guarantors of the Versailles system – in the face of Nazi Germany's territorial claims.

The Romanian authorities acted in accordance with the traditional friendship to Czechoslovakia, rejecting the offer to occupy some parts of the territory of sub-Carpathian Ukraine/Ruthenia, despite the fact that they were inhabited, among others, by Maramureş Romanians. Romania did not want to profit in any way from the collapse of the collective security system and, above all, did not accept the idea of abandoning the fundamental principle of its foreign policy: the in-

tangibility of European borders, as they were sanctioned by the peace treaties at the end of World War I. By refusing to take part in the occupation and partition of a friendly and allied state, Romania sought to assign a moral significance to its stance, not only for this case in particular, but as a general statement on international relations. In the words of Romanian prime-minister Armand Călinescu, "We wanted everybody to know that whenever Romania joins an alliance, it will remain sincere and loyal to it". Moreover, the Romanian state received thousands of Czechoslovakian refugees, military and civilians.

Therefore, today's event subscribes to the larger framework of friendly relations between the two states and armies and, in this context, I would like to mention the participation of Romanian soldiers to the Western front during the Second World War and their sacrifices for the liberation of Czech and Slovak territories. The losses among Romanian soldiers on Czechoslovak territory reached the figure of 66.995 (dead or missing), representing roughly 30% of the total effectives engaged in combat. In their memory, honorary cemeteries were built in Brno and Kroměříž, containing the vast majority of Romanian soldiers killed in action on Czech territory, representing a model for the gratitude and care the Czech authorities demonstrated for the Romanians who lost their lives in the line of duty.

In the post-war period, the two countries entered the Soviet sphere of influence, the political and military cooperation between the two being often influenced by their membership to the Warsaw Pact.

Another crucial moment in the history of the relations between the two states is represented by the events of 1968, when the member states of the Warsaw Pact intervened in Czecho-

slovakia in order to crush the Prague Spring. Romania, defying the dangers, publicly condemned the intervention, through the voice of the leader in Bucharest, demonstrating once again the solidarity with Czechoslovakia and the friendship towards an old ally.

At the end of 1992, the peaceful separation between the two states, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, received Romania's support, the latter recognizing the Czech Republic as a sovereign and independent state on January 1st, 1993.

After 1993, the Romanian-Czech relations continued on the same coordinates, namely in the tradition of friendship from the interwar and post-war period. In its turn, as Romania's good friend, the Czech Republic continuously supported our country's efforts towards NATO and EU membership and, in the present, towards joining the Schengen Area. It is also worth mentioning that it was during the Prague Summit of 2002 when Romania was invited, along other states, to join the North-Atlantic Alliance.

So, this is the brief history of the Romanian-Czech relations of friendship and cooperation, which were constantly based on common interests and values, consolidated in time, on certain similarities in foreign policy objectives, on a good bilateral and multilateral collaboration and, last but not least, on the fact that there were no disputes, territorial or of any other nature, between the two states at any point in history.

The approach of the "Munich 1938" episode in an academic format at such a high level, as it undoubtedly is the case here, has multiple meanings. The Munich Conference from 75 years ago was the result of a policy of concession and, at times, of capitulation in the face of German revisionism, a policy intended to put an end to the territorial claims. Unfortunately, the obtained effect was the opposite, as the event we are evoking today represented, in fact, the opening of Pandora's box,

demonstrating to the whole world that keeping the peace at the price of major concessions made to leaders with revanchist and anti-democratic views had disastrous consequences for the future. At the same time, the Munich episode represents a lesson worth remembering so that this kind of politics would never seriously affect the security balance and the entire apparatus of international relations.

In the end, I wish the Conference success and I would like to salute, once again, the distinguished guests from the Czech Republic, expressing my firm belief that these activities have a major contribution in the development of traditional relations of friendship between our peoples and our countries.

PAPERS

Romania's Foreign Policy in the 1930s. Impact of the Munich Agreement

Viorica Moisuc

At the Munich Conference in September 1938, Hitler, Mussolini, Daladier and Chamberlain decided – with no opinion poll among the Czechoslovakian people, with no consent from the government in Prague or the President of the Republic, by ignoring the decisions of the October 28 and 30, 1918, of the Czech and Slovakian citizens[1] to establish an independent

[1] The revolutionary ebullience throughout the entire Habesburg empire radicalized concomitantly with the defeat of the Austro-Hungarian army in the war. In the last decade of October 1918, the population of Prague began crucial actions to express their wish to be free; in the St. Venceslas square, they smashed the insignia of the Austrian domination and raised the Czech and the Slovakian flags; The Czech National Committee took over the public administration from the hands of the Austrians; in the afternoon of the 28th of October, the National Committee took on the interim ruling of the public affairs of the new state. It is worth mentioning that during this difficult times the Romanian troops stationed in Prague – the 2nd regiment Braşov, the 51st regiment Cluj and part of the 37th regiment Oradea –, integrated as the *Romanian Legion,* were ordered to ensure the security of the Czechoslovak National Council in its action to support the independence of the new state. (See George Moroianu, *The struggle for emancipation of the Transylvanian Romanians in the European light,* Bucharest, 1929, p. 29). On October 30, 1918, the Slovak National Committee launched the *Declaration* which proclaimed the separation of Slovakia from the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and the establishment of the Czechoslovak state (K. Krofta, *Histoire de la Tchécoslovaquie,* Maestricht, Paris, Bruxelles, 1934, p. 144). The peace treaties at Versailles (with Germany – June 28, 1919), at Saint-Germain (with Austria – September 10, 1919), at Trianon (with Hungary – June 4, 1920) expressed the international legal acknowledgement of the new state within the boundaries set by the self-determination documents (see details in *Assertion of the unitary independent national states in Centrul and South-East*

state in the geographic and historical area of the ancient kingdoms, by violation of the 1919 -1920 peace treaties, of the provisions of the Covenant of the League of Nations, of the 1928 Briand-Kellogg Pact, of the 1933 Convention for the Definition of Aggression and Territory, by trampling on the direct and indirect commitments to Czechoslovakia undertaken in 1925 by the Locarno treaty powers, by ignoring the special commitments of France and the USSR towards Czechoslovakia to supply help in case of German aggression –, they decided to tear to pieces the national territory of this old and faithful ally, thus complying with the absurd revisionist demands of Germany and clearing also the way for the further splitting of the territory of the Czechoslovakian state.

The German-Italian-French-English Munich Agreement was null and void *ab initio*, the same as all the other agreements made by the great powers at the expense of many peoples throughout those years. In the long run, however, their consequences lived on, some of them until the very present day, with serious human, political, economic social and cultural damages.

Such was the course of the first stage of the Czechoslovakian crisis – in fact, an European crisis –, a confirmation of the disintegration of democracy in Europe, a process that had begun many years before in the circumstances of unrelenting drive of revanchism and revisionism, of the display of international terrorism, as well as of the tolerance of the democratic powers to such actions and, last but not least, of their joining in with the aggressor. On March 15, 1939, Czechoslovakia was the second sovereign and independent state wiped out off the map Europe.

Europe (1821-1923,), managers: Viorica Moisuc, Ion Calafeteanu, Academiei Publishing House, Bucharest, 1979, pp. 145-177).

Romania's international situation in the late 1930s featured the following characteristics: as a unitary, independent, national state, following the decisions of the 1918 referendum in Kishinev, Czernowitz and Alba-Iulia, consolidated by the Saint-Germain, Trianon and Paris peace treaties of 1919 and 1920, Romania had cooperation and alliance relations with Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Turkey, Greece (stipulated in the treaties which were the basis of the Little Entente and the Balkan Entente); Poland, which fostered territorial claims against Czechoslovakia, rejected any Romanian attempt to become part of the Central-European regional alliance system; the USSR, which had never acknowledged the validity of the union of Bessarabia with Romania, constantly kept up her claims for this province, and resuming the diplomatic relations between the two governments in June 1934 didn't alter at all the attitude of the Soviets towards Romania; moreover, the bilateral relations were tainted by Moscow's constant denial to return the Romanian Treasure seized on January 13/26, 1918; Hungary, dissatisfied with the loss of her older territorial captures, furthered constantly an aggressive revisionist policy against Romania and Czechoslovakia, for the revision of the territorial clauses of the Trianon peace treaty and for the recovery of the lost possessions; the first military attempt in this direction took place, as well known, in 1919-1920, when Bela Kun's Hungarian Red Army, in collusion with Lenin, attacked Romania and Czechoslovakia. From that time on, Hungary acted as an insecurity factor in Central Europe, in close cooperation with the revisionist powers, Germany, Italy, the USSR, Bulgaria. On Hungarian territory there were set up boot camps for the terrorist groups acting in Europe at the order of the Fascist powers; the terrorist action of October 1934 against King Alexander of Yugoslavia and the French foreign affairs

minister Louis Barthou engaged the Hungarian state in a weary and complicated international process.

Bulgaria, which fostered the fantasy of a „Greater Bulgaria" devised by the Russian foreign policy at San-Stefano in 1878, was keeping up her territorial claims not only against Romania, but also against other neighbouring countries; consequently, Bulgaria represented, next to Hungary and the USSR, one more factor of instability in the Central & South-East European area. The non-involvement of the former great allies – France and England – in the strengthening of the territorial status-quo, of the security and peace in Central and South-East Europe and, moreover, their acceptance of German revanchism and its direction towards the same area – see the Locarno Treaties - contributed heavily to the weakening of the resilience of the states addressed by the German-Hungarian aggression, to the suppression of their defence capacity when facing external dangers.

*

The goal of the German *Drang nach Osten* policy – Central Europe with everything it represented in point of industrial potential, outlet for German merchandise, capital investments, geo-strategic and military position of major importance for Germany's economic and political expansion to the South-East, enhanced by the establishment of German control along the entire course of the Danube – and then on to the Black Sea and the Straits – this goal was pursued systematically and obstinately by the Weimar Republic and, further on, by the national-socialist regime. The defeated Germany, subjected to a draconian peace treaty, had planned and included as far back as 1918-1919, in her first constitution, the integration of Austria as an *Anschluß*. That's why, in the Versailles peace treaty, *Germany was compelled* to observe the independence of the

Republic Austria. However, this restriction did not harm in any way the goal of the German foreign policy, which was only delayed.

Once it had annexed Austria, with no actual opposition to this aggressive action on the part of either this very victim or the Society of Nations, or of the great western democratic states, Germany's next goal was Czechoslovakia. The invasion of the Bohemian plateau – a strategic point of crucial importance for the control on Central and South-East Europe, the seizure of the Skoda industrial platform and the annihilation of the political and military power of the Little Entente and the Balkan Entente – here are but a few of the issues in close connection with the destruction of Czechoslovakia.

The Czechoslovak crisis set off just after Austria had been occupied and drew all the Central-European states into its turmoil; their security and the very existence of some of them relied directly on the involvement of the great democratic powers in the quenching of the devastating flood of the German war machine, the more so as the revisionist states in that region, such as Hungary and Poland, were making use of this opportunity in view of appropriating in due time certain territories belonging to the Czechoslovak state.

Romania's vital interests in maintaining the territorial *status-quo* such as it had been acknowledged by the 1919-1920 Paris Peace Treaties and in safeguarding her national independence were tightly related to keeping Czechoslovakia as an independent and sovereign state; this was an old and loyal ally for Romania, an important pillar of the Little Entente, the main armament supply source for the alliance. The international and regional danger was deepened by the penetration of Mussolini's Italy into Albania and Bulgaria, by Germany's increasing economic influence throughout the entire Central & South-East European area, particularly after the remilitariza-

tion of Rhineland on March 7, 1936, when the Locarno powers had not shown the slightest real sign resistance; it was also worsened by the centrifugal trends of Yugoslavia which tended openly to side with Italy and Bulgaria, to the detriment of the allies in the Little Entente and the Balkan Entente.

The persistence of the Romanian-Czechoslovak community of interests which was the foundation supporting the anti-revisionist policy of those states for their collective security and the observance of the peace treaties, promoted in the interwar time, became more manifest – in the period before the Munich treaty and later on as well – in the intensive diplomatic activity aimed at setting off the plans for the disintegration and annihilation of Czechoslovakia, in the solidarity of the two peoples.

The legal foundation of Romania's diplomatic actions consisted in the provisions of the Little Entente Pact and of the military convention signed on the 14th of September 1923[2] , extended in 1926, expired on September 14, 1929 and was replaced by a Protocol, followed by a new Convention in 1931. The military convention signed in Bucharest on the 11th of May 1931 kept, with only some alterations, the provisions of the previous conventions: if one of the allies were to be attacked by Hungary without having made any challenge in turn, then, upon the request of the attacked state, the other two allies should order the mobilization of their armed forces within 48 hours from receipt of an official request and attack Hungary with all their available forces; such measures were coming into effect also when one of the allies was attacked by Hungary while being at war with another power.

[2] *Romanian Military Archives* (further on *A.M.R.*), fond Little Entente, file 24, Military Convention of the Little Entente of 14 September 1923.

Under the circumstances of the events following the establishment of Hitler's dictatorship in Germany, meetings of the chiefs of staff of the three allied states took place in Belgrade in 1935, and then in Bucharest in June 1936; during the talks the missions assigned to the allies in case of a joint action of Germany, Italy, Hungary and Poland in view of isolating Czechoslovakia. Following the Bucharest Conference, the Romanian Chief of Staff estimated that *„Czechoslovakia is in one of the most difficult situations"* and showed that *„if Russia remains the ally of France and understands to help Czechoslovakia, we have to allow the Russian forces to cross Romania in order to assist the Czech army".* [3]

The conclusion of the perpetual friendship agreements between Italy and Yugoslavia[4] and Bulgaria and Yugoslavia and their serious consequences for the political and military balance in the area, the annexation of Austria by Germany in March 1938 and the rising danger of German-Hungarian revisionism were objective factors that determined a weakening the cohesion of the Little Entente and, consequently, of the resistance force of the countries targeted by territorial claims. The meeting held on April 19, 1938 by Romania's Supreme Defence Council with regard to these issued the following resulted in the following considerations: *„In the present political situation, particularly after the annexation of Austria to Germany, the immediate danger comes from the West, where Hungary, and especially Germany, could put us in the situation to lead a war*

[3] Apud Viorica Moisuc, *The Romanian diplomacy and the matter of defending the national sovereignty and independence in the period March 1938 – May 1920,* Romanian Academy Publishing House, Bucharest, 1971, p. 46.

[4] *A.M.St.M.*, file 51, fol. 757, Protocol of the session of the Supreme Defence Council of 19 April 1938. See also *Allianz Hitler-Horthy-Mussolini 1934-1944,* Akademiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1966, Dok. No. 36.

under very dire conditions, with no efficient help on the part of Czechoslovakia, which could be locked by Germany even without any Yugoslav support".[5]

The French foreign policy which, even back then, was concerned about the dark prospects of the evolution of the political crisis in Central Europe after the fall of Austria, considered that defending Czechoslovakia was a vital requirement for the security of Europe. In his discussion with Constantin Cesianu, Romania's minister in Paris, on March 21, Jean Paul – Boncour, the holder of the seat at Quai d' Orsay, pointed out: *„Not moving in for safeguarding Czechoslovakia is equal to accept the German domination in Central and South-East Europe. What standing up for this country means, which we will certainly do, is quite clear to us".*[6] As reported by Cesianu, the French minister of foreign affairs had in mind the setting up of a defence system of Czechoslovakia based on the common action of every ally of this country, a system which might have counteract the defeatist trends of the Chamberlain government. Paul-Boncour thought that *„the transit of the soviet troops with our consent or without our opposition would be the rescue of Czechoslovakia and the braking of the German hegemony, nowadays in an indomitable expansion".*[7]

However, Paul-Boncour's perspective was far of being shared by the new prime-minister, Edouard Daladier, who did not tarry to bring into Vergennes' cabinet the peacemaker Georges Bonnet. Very soon, the position of France fell in line with that of Great Britain with regard to the outcome of the European political crisis in the Czechoslovak matter.

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] *Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania* (further on: A.M.A.E.), Fond 71/ 1938, C7, Vol. 300, cable 4773, Paris, 21 March 1938, signed Cesianu.

[7] *Ibidem.*

In late April, after the French-British discussions in London, the Romanian diplomacy considered that a conclusion had taken shape, namely that of „ineluctability" of abandoning Czechoslovakia. Gathered in the Romanian embassy in Paris, the ministers of Turkey, Yugoslavia and Romania analysed the alarming trends which were emerging in the policy of the Daladier government. *„The French-English agreement* – transmitted the minister Constantin Cesianu to Bucharest – *will not attain its full value until the French foreign policy will become again that what we all wish, for its own interest, for our interest and that of strengthening peace in Europe".*[8] On May 7, Cesianu cabled again to the minister of foreign affairs Petrescu-Comnen: *„The advice given in Prague by London and Paris on the subject matter of the Sudetes is to make as much concessions as possible up to the utmost point of defending the existence of Czechoslovakia as an independent state...".*[9] Likewise, from Prague, the minister Stănescu informed – in connection with the French-British interventions by Krofta – that the British ambassador, Newton, *„gave to understand that the reforms requested from Czechoslovakia because of the tense political situation should be heroic and thorough, even beyond the present framework of the Constitution".*[10] At the same time, pursuant to a conversation with Henderson, the British ambassador, minister Radu Djuvara transmitted from Berlin: *„In case of a German hit, [*against Czechoslovakia*], London will not budge and England's immobility will paralyze France".*[11]

[8] *Ibidem,* cable no. 4899, Paris, 6 May 1938, confidential, signed Cesianu, to Nicolae Petrescu-Comnen.

[9] *Ibidem*, cable no. 4900, Paris, 7 May 1938, signed Cesianu to Petrescu-Comnen.

[10] *Ibidem*, report no. 1230/C, strictly confidential, Prague, 9 May 1938, signed Stănescu.

[11] *Ibidem*, cable, not numbered, Berlin, 10 May 1938, signed Djuvara, to Petrescu-Comnen.

The position of the Romanian government as to the rapidly evolving events was expressed officially on May 22 by the minister of foreign affairs Nicolae Petrescu-Comnen before the German minister in Bucharest, Fabricius, summoned at the Sturdza Palace: *„An armed between Germany and Czechoslovakia* – declared Comnen – *will inevitably generate a European war. Which will be impossible to fence in",* and added: *„Whatever endangers the existence of Czechoslovakia will not leave us indifferent".* Comnen asked the German government to embrace a fair and calm attitude, in order to prevent a catastrophe.[12]

Then, beyond their contract obligations and unilaterally, the Romanian government accepted the cross-country flight through their air space of an important number of airplanes from the USSR to Czechoslovakia. Moreover – Petrescu-Comnen wrote in a retrospective report – *„when some of these planes, because certain engine breakdowns, were forced to land on our territory, we allowed their engineers to make the necessary repairs and to take off. Such a case* – remembers Comnen – *happened in April 1938, and brought upon us the rebuke of colonel Beck, our ally in Warsaw, who had completely other feelings than friendly ones for Czechoslovakia".*[13] The Polish ambassador in Paris, Lukasiewicz, protested immediately at the Quai d'Orsay, specifying that Poland would withstand in arms any attempt of soviet troops or airplanes to cross Polish territory or air space in order to assist Czechoslovakia.[14] On May 30, Göring was also informed about this decision of the Romanian

[12] N.P. Comnen, *Un point d' histoire vecue,* in "Acta Historica", tomus 1, Romae, 1959, pp. 318-319.

[13] *Ibidem*, p. 320. These details were reported also by the Adrien Thierry, former minister of France in Bucharest, in two articles published in „Le Monde" of 18 November and, respectively, 11 December 1947. See also Georges Bonnet, *De Munich à la Guerre,* Paris, Plon, 1967, p. 51.

[14] Georges Bonnet, *op.cit.*, p. 53.

government, with the additional specification that the matter involved airplanes that seemed to have flown higher than 3000 metres, making them thus out of reach for the Romanian defence artillery.

The tight cooperation between Prague and Bucharest during this period also materialized in the supply of information with regard to extensive terrorist actions arranged on Romanian soil aim to remove the government. On August 17, the Czechoslovak General Staff handed over to the Romanian military attaché in Prague the letter no. 25 410, which contained information pieces about *"Berlin's endeavour to organize terrorist actions in Romania to rattle the position of the government and to overthrow it".*[15] The intelligence service in Prague had found out that the press attaché of the German legation, Freiherr von Gregory (who had been tailed since a long time for his espionage activity) was in charge of organizing this action; in the first half of August, in Prague, he had held several conferences with different groups of German agents who were going to leave for Romania.

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The specifics of the development of the Czechoslovak crisis and the international force balance in the summer of 1938 in favour of a reconcilement with Hitler by sacrificing Czechoslovakia imparted objectively a rather minor importance to the issue of a possible transit of the soviet troops through Romania. The factors with a decisive role in putting a stop to the aggressive Nazi policy – France, England and the USSR – eluded their firm commitments towards Czechoslovakia, under all kinds of pretence. The exacting pressure made on the Prague

[15] A.M.A.E., Fond 71/Romania, Vol. 352, Letter General Staff. Section II, no. 13939 of 24 August 1938 to Ministry of Foreign Affairs (M.A.E.), 60/66.

government in favour of meeting to the maximum extent the German demands, "sustained" by the so-called cause of safeguarding the world peace, determined a catastrophe in Europe as a whole: the war appeared as unavoidable and the first victims were the countries East of Czechoslovakia: Romania and Poland.

The criminal Munich agreement worsened immediately and irreversibly the circumstances in Romania. All that the Romanian diplomacy was able to do in the following period of time was only to keep up, via an extremely fragile balance and with huge sacrifices, the delay of carving up the country's national territory.

The Munich agreement did not "bring peace for an entire generation" – as claimed by Chamberlain after he had signed the document that sacrificed Czechoslovakia, on the contrary, it caused great strides towards the world war. The period between the 29th September 1938 and the 1st September 1939 witnessed the preparation of the policy which would lead, several years later, to a new slicing of territories and distribution of the reach areas among the great players – this time for many dozen years.

Czechoslovak Foreign Policy in the Turbulent 1930s (Until the Munich Diktat of September 1938)

Jindřich Dejmek

With the beginning of the 1930s dramatic changes occurred in the political situation in Europe that necessarily determined also the further orientation of Czechoslovakia's foreign policy. The "founding fathers" of the Czechoslovak state, President Tomáš Masaryk and the long-time Minister of Foreign Affairs Edvard Beneš, committed the new state soon after its creation to a strongly idealist orientation, namely towards a reconstruction of Europe and to its new internationalist organization, the League of Nations, through which the Czechoslovak Republic was firmly linked to the democratic West.[1] A specific goal of the policymakers in Prague was to create a new "community of efforts, ideas and interests for the new states in Central Europe, namely Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Romania,

[1] Much literature is today available on the Czechoslovak foreign policy between the two world wars that cannot be reviewed here. Some of the main problems (with reference to major sources) are referred to in the author's review: Jindřich Dejmek, *Československo, jeho sousedé a velmoci ve XX. století (1918-1992). Vybrané kapitoly z dějin československé zahraniční politiky* [Czechoslovakia, its neighbors and the Powers in the 20th century (1918-1992). Selected chapters from the history of Czechoslovak foreign policy]. Centrum pro ekonomii politiku, Praha 2002; the chronological review of main foreign political activities of Prague diplomacy contains also the first part of biography: Jindřich Dejmek, *Edvard Beneš. Politická biografie českého demokrata.* Část I. *Revolucionář a diplomat (1884–1935)* [Edvard Beneš. Political biography of the Czech democrat. Part I. A revolutionary and diplomat (1884–1935)]. Karolinum, Praha 2006, chap. VII through XV.

and potentially also Hungary and Austria."[2] The young diplomacy of the Czechoslovak state made every effort in all these directions, although in many cases only a torso of the goals could be achieved.

The Geneva institution failed to be as important as planned at the moment of signing the peace treaties. Due to the development of US and British policy, only a political alliance with the Third Republic of France remained of the vision of close co-operation with the democratic Powers of the West. After the signing of peace treaties, Central Europe remained irreconcilably split between the victorious countries and those that had been defeated, striving for a reversion of the new structure, which was on the other hand to be prevented by the result of Beneš's diplomatic initiative, the Little Entente, i.e., an alliance of the Czechoslovak Republic with the Kingdom of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs, and Romania. However, the political consequences of the Great Depression, namely the strengthening of the nationalist, anti-Versailles forces in the Weimar Republic as well as other factors made the leading Prague politicians and diplomats face new challenges and even threats, exceeding soon considerably the dynamics of the preceding decade.

Soon afterwards, in March 1931, the German foreign policy launched after long preparations the first important action aimed against the post-Versailles territorial system by initiating negotiations on a protocol of customs union with Austria. Owing to joint efforts of Czechoslovakia, France and Italy it was possible to stop this project, which was undoubted-

[2] Quoted from Beneš's parliament speech on 7 November 1919. In: Edvard Beneš, *Problémy nové Evropy a zahraniční politika československá; projevy a úvahy z r. 1919-1924* [Problems of New Europe and Czechoslovak foreign policy; speeches and reflections from the years 1919-1924]. Melantrich, Praha 1924, p. 41.

ly dangerous for the further development in Central Europe.[3] Nevertheless, the revisionist efforts of Berlin, fostered by the strong nationalist radicalization in the Weimar Republic, continued. Already in 1932, Hitler's NSDAP became the greatest political force in the country that in January of the following year came to power. Due to the Nazi program aiming at a Pan-German Empire in Central Europe, that the new Berlin rulers intended to ruthlessly implement, the takeover of power by Hitler necessarily, sooner or later, strongly influenced the whole situation in Europe, including (*primarily*) the position of its neighboring country, Czechoslovakia.[4]

Simultaneously, with strong support by Mussolini's Italy, the revisionist efforts of Hungary headed by the pro-fascist general Gyula Gömböss continued. And it was in 1932 that the French alliance system became weakened by the starting crisis of the French-Polish alliance as a result of the large concessions of the West to Germany; this was increased in the following year by the attitude of Paris to Mussolini's project

[3] See, e.g., Jindřich Dejmek, *Československo-rakouské politické vztahy v období jednání o německo-rakouskou celní unii (1930-1931*) [Czechoslovak-Austrian political relations in the period of negotiations on German-Austrian customs union (1930-1931)]. In: Moderní dějiny, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1994, pp. 233-262; Miroslav Šepták, *Panevropa, nebo Anšlus? Zahraničněpolitické pozadí německo-rakouské celní unie v roce 1931* [Pan-Europe or Anschluss? International political background of the German-Austrian customs union in 1931]. In: Dvacáté století, No. 2, 2010, where additional literature is also available.

[4] An excellent analysis of the Nazi foreign political plans and their initial implementation was made, e.g., by Gerhard L. Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler´s Germany. Diplomatic Revolution in Europe 1933-36.* Chicago-London 1971, particularly pp. 87-116; in a review also by Jindřich Dejmek, *Nacistická třetí říše a československá diplomacie 1933-1938* [The Nazi Third Reich and Czechoslovak diplomacy 1933-1938]. In: Moderní dějiny, Vol. 5, No. 5, 1997, pp. 149-163.

of Great Powers' Directorium known as *the Four Power Pact*.[5] Simultaneously with the radicalization of German politics a new orientation of foreign policy of the Soviet Union started in response to the growth of Nazism slowly undermining the Rapallo-based co-operation with Berlin and establishing in the course of 1932 better relations with France that was symbolized by the Non-Aggression Pact between France and the USSR signed in November of the same year.[6]

One of the first reactions of the Czechoslovak Minister of Foreign Affairs, Edvard Beneš, to these dramatic changes was his (not first) attempt of approaching Poland, though to a limited extent. The relations between Prague and Warsaw, two major eastern allies of France, did not exceed from the mid-twenties – in spite of some military cooperation – the level of cool, though frequently broken correctness, and it certainly provided potential of radical positive changes. And the Czechoslovak Minister of Foreign Affairs already during his second meeting with the new head of Polish diplomacy, Colonel Józef Beck, in February 1933 proposed to his counterpart to conclude *"a pact of general friendship that would in addition to what was agreed already in 1924* (actually, 1925 – JD) *provide for such measures that neither country need to have on their common 1000 km long border a single soldier, even in peace time and even if either country faces a conflict with a third-party state..."*[7]

[5] See, e.g., Piotr S. Wandycz, *The Twilight of French Eastern Alliances 1926-1936*. Princeton 1988, particularly p. 259 ff.

[6] See, e.g., Jonathan Haslam, *Soviet Foreign Policy, 1930-1933.* Macmillan, London 1983, passim.

[7] For details of these negotiations see, e.g., Jerzy Kozeński, *Czechosłowacja w polskiej polityce zagranicznej w latach 1932-1938.* Instytut Zachodni, Poznań 1964, particularly p. 70 nn; recently (based on bilateral diplomatic documentation) Jindřich Dejmek, *Pokus o československo-polské sblížení počátkem třicátých let a jeho nezdar 1932 – 1934* [An attempt of Czechoslovak-Polish rapprochement in the early 1930s and its failure 1932-1934]. In: Moderní dějiny, Vol. 4, No. 4, 1995, pp. 195-219.

The advances made between the two countries intensified with the above project of Four-Power Pact whose revisionist goals obviously threatened both Poland and Czechoslovakia. Even Poland's representation headed by J. Piłsudski rather cool with respect to Czechoslovakia, started considering a rapprochement, whose first manifestation was expected to be Beck's visit to Prague. Nevertheless, Beneš was making every diplomatic effort at that time to either fully liquidate, or at least strongly weaken the European Directorium Plan, constituting a danger to most of the small new countries, and he in fact succeeded, namely with respect to the French version of the plan of April 1933.[8] Prague, and the whole Little Entente, was ready to accept the Paris alternative; this, however, like other steps taken by Czechoslovak diplomacy prior to Locarno in 1925, provoked an extremely negative response in Poland. Warsaw lost any interest in developing close cooperation with Prague, which was not only due to a totally different vision of the nature of potential agreement, but primarily due to the gradual improvement of relations between Poland and Germany. Consequently, when the Czechoslovak Embassy submitted by the end of 1933 to the Polish Foreign Office a draft political agreement, the document was actually rejected.[9] Polish diplomacy was at that time already finishing its negotiations on a non-aggression instrument with Berlin that culminated with the famous declaration of 26 January 1934. This did not mean only

[8] The French version of the project submitted on 10 April, which served then as a basis of further negotiations and in June also of initialed document, either fully eliminated most of the revisionist elements of Mussolini's original proposal, or linked them closely to the text of the League of Nations Pact. For details see Zbigniew Mazur, *Pakt Czterech*. Instytut Zachodni, Poznań 1979, p. 217 ff.

[9] The text of the Czechoslovak proposal, whose existence was mentioned in reports by V. Girsa, Czechoslovak envoy in Warsaw, in 1933/34, and in the memoirs of the French envoy in Warsaw, J. Laroche, could not be found in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives in Prague.

an essential change of the political climate in the whole Central European region, but it was soon followed by a dramatic aggravation of the Polish-Czechoslovak relations.[10]

II

More important (and far-reaching), however, than the attempts of establishing cooperation with Poland proved to be the engagement of Czechoslovak diplomacy in the Franco-Soviet rapprochement, the actual start of which constituted the new draft Franco-Russian agreement of October 1933.[11] This was followed by a Soviet proposal of multilateral guarantee pact against potential German aggression which was supposed (according to the project of late December 1933) to include in addition to the two Powers also Poland, Czechoslovakia, the Baltic states, and Finland and which was from its very beginning diplomatically intensely supported by Beneš .[12]

The Czechoslovak Foreign Minister, who was well aware – as he put it in a letter to his long-time political colleague and friend,

[10] For details see Jerzy Kozeński, *Wplyw deklaracji polsko-niemieckiej o nieagresji na ksztaltowanie sie stosunków polsko-czechosłowackich.* In: Przegląd zachodni, No. 2, 1963, pp. 218-236.

[11] For details see Vilnis J. Sipols, *Vněšnaja politika SSSR. 1933-1935.* Nauka, Moscow 1980, p. 148 ff.; Jean-Baptist Duroselle, *Politique étrangère de la France. La Décadence 1932-39.* Imprimerie Nationale, Paris 1979, pp. 77-78.

[12] Project details are best described in: Jarosław Jurkiewicz, *Pakt Wschodni. Z historii stosunków międzynarodowych w latach 1934-1935.* Warszawa 1963, passim; from recent literature see: Jindřich Dejmek, *Baltické státy a projekt Východního Paktu* [The Baltic States and the East Pact Project]. In: Jindřich Dejmek, Josef Hanzal (eds.), České země a Československo v Evropě XIX. a XX. století. Sborník prací k 65. narozeninám prof. dr. Roberta Kvačka [The Bohemian Lands and Czechoslovakia in Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries. Collection of studies on the occasion of 65th anniversary of Prof. Dr. Robert Kvaček]. Historický ústav, Praha 1997, pp. 277-315.

Edouard Herriot – of the Czechoslovak *„splendid isolation among European dictators"*, even co-operated with his French counterpart, Louis Barthou, on the preparation of a French counterproposal, known as the *East Pact*, that was submitted to the Soviet Union late in April 1934.[13] The document anticipated the Mutual Assistance Pact between Czechoslovakia, Poland, the Baltic States, and primarily the USSR and Germany, and was supposed to be accompanied by a French-Soviet treaty of alliance. Such system could considerably reduce, or at least considerably complicate the danger of aggression by any of the "dynamic" dictators. Thus, Czechoslovakia was to be involved in a Pan-European security system similar to the system that had been planned by Czechoslovak diplomacy already in the mid-twenties.

Beneš, although he certainly had to expect a failure of such a widely-conceived system, welcomed it eventually as an end to the existing Russian-German co-operation. *„There is no doubt that the European situation will completely change if Russia now finally enters European politics... A new constellation, new balance will emerge."* Even in the case of East Locarno Project failure *"what must definitely remain of it is closer relations to Russia and its participation in European politics, which will constitute a permanent progress and benefit to us and to the situation in Central Europe..."*[14] And the further steps taken by Czechoslovak diplomacy were based on this principle.

[13] Robert Kvaček, *Jednání o Východní pakt v letech 1934-1935* [East Pact negotiations 1934-1935]. In: Acta Universitatis Carolinae, Phil-Hist No. 3, 1966, pp. 16-17; the quotation of Beneš's letter to E. Herriot comes from here.

[14] Archiv ministerstva zahraničních věcí (AMZV), Praha [Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, Prague], Fond Telegrams sent in 1934, Nos. 337-367/34, Beneš's circular of 17 June; see also: Jindřich Dejmek (ed.), *Edvard Beneš, Cirkulární telegramy 1920-1935* [Edvard Beneš, Circular telegrams 1920-1935]. From documents of the Archives of the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Edvard Beneš Society, Praha 2002, doc. No. 196, pp. 222-224 (further referred to as *Beneš, Circular telegrams* + doc. No.).

On 9 June 1934, at last, regular diplomatic relations were established between Prague and Moscow (as well as between the USSR and Romania), and three months later the head of Prague diplomacy became largely involved in the admission procedure related to the USSR joining the League of Nations.[15] When it became clear that due to the resistance of both Germany and Poland the original East Locarno idea would not succeed, Prague decided to join France in its cooperation with the USSR. Further German *fait accompli* steps against the Versailles system, such as reintroduction of obligatory military service and announced massive building of armed forces in March 1935, fostered the above decision; we can even say that it was Prague diplomacy that exerted pressure on Paris to finalize the negotiations with Moscow. In view of Berlin's policy and its actual co-operators in Central Europe, and also with regard to the obvious efforts of the new French Foreign Minister, Pierre Laval[16] (with London patronage in the background) to achieve an agreement with Germany there was actually, as the Slovak historian Ladislav Deák puts it, *"…no choice for the Czechoslovak policymakers if they wanted to prevent an aggression against their country."*[17] When the Franco-Soviet Treaty of Alliance was signed on 2 May of the same year, the preparation of a Soviet-Czechoslovak treaty could be speedily accomplished

[15] For details see, e.g., Jaroslav Beránek, *Vstup Sovětského svazu do Společnosti národů* [Soviet Union joining the League of Nations]. In: Slovanský přehled, Vol. 72, No. 2, 1986, pp. 168-176.

[16] He succeeded as Head of Quai d´Orsay Louis Barthou who had been assassinated in October 1934.

[17] Ladislav Deák, *Československo-sovietska zmluva z roku 1935 a európska bezpečnosť* [Czechoslovak-Soviet Treaty of 1935 and European security]. In: František Hejl (ed.), Československo-sovětské vztahy jako faktor mezinárodní politiky (1917-1970). Academia, Praha 1975, p. 92.

within the next two weeks. On 16 May it was signed by Beneš and the Soviet envoy in Prague, Sergey S. Alexandrovsky.[18]

Although some details related to the preparation of the above document are not fully clear yet, it is obvious that it was upon Prague's initiative that a protocol was added to the treaty that expressly linked its commitments to the stipulations of the Franco-Soviet Pact, and it also stated that "*the mutual assistance obligations between them* (i.e., the contracting parties – USSR and Czechoslovakia – JD) *shall only be effective provided the conditions foreseen in this Treaty are met and if assistance to the victim of the attack has been provided by France*."[19] Czechoslovak documentation shows that Beneš had several reasons for this; it was not only the fear of becoming potentially involved in an isolated conflict between the USSR and some other Power, particularly Germany, but his main concern was *the Central European horizon.* The wording of the Franco-Soviet treaty (that the above quoted protocol directly referred to), saying that it cannot be applied "*unless its principles are*

[18] For the text of French-Soviet Treaty on Mutual Assistance see: Zahraniční politika 1935 [Foreign Policy 1935]. Ed. J. Chmelař, Praha 1935, pp. 324-325; *Ibid.* (pp. 325-326) and signing protocol. Czechoslovak-Soviet Treaty is best published In: *Dokumenty a materiály k dějinám československo-sovětských vztahů* [Documents and materials on the history of Czechoslovak-Soviet relations] Vol. III. Praha 1979, doc. No. 65, pp. 123-126.

[19] For all details see Sergej I. Prasolov, *Československo-sovětská smouva o vzájemné pomoci z roku 1935* [Czechoslovak-Soviet Treaty on Mutual Assistance 1935]. In: Studie z dějin československo-sovětských vztahu 1917-1938, Academia, Praha 1967, particularly pp. 80-98; briefly also Čestmír Amort (ed.), *Přehled dějin československo-sovětských vztahů v údobí 1917-1939* [Review of the history of Czechoslovak-Soviet relations in 1917-1939]. Praha 1975, pp. 255-257. Last detailed analysis of the "French" clause in the protocol was made – not too convincingly – by Ivan Pfaff, *Die Sowjetunion und die Verteidigung der Tschechoslowakei 1934-1938*. Versuch der Revision einer Legende. Böhlau Verlag, Köln – *Weimar* – Wien 1996, pp. 58-68.

compatible with the contractual commitments of either party", linked in fact the pact to the Locarno system on the one hand and, on the other hand, eliminated the obligations in case of Soviet-Polish war.[20] Beneš informed in the same spirit also Berlin and Warsaw through the Czechoslovak envoys. In spite of that Czechoslovakia became very soon the target of hostile attacks of both German and Polish propaganda depicting it as an instrument of Moscow in Central Europe.

The accusations of Soviet military presence, particularly through Air Force units, in Czechoslovakia that in the Nazi propaganda in the coming months took on the form of real hysteria, were in fact absolutely unfounded. In Czechoslovakia, except for several short-time visits of small groups of aircraft 1935-36, there were no Soviet military troops,[21] but moreover, no military convention was signed between Prague and Moscow, and until 1938 there was no specific cooperation between the general staff.[22] This, of course, from the very begin-

[20] Beneš explicitly rejected the Soviet proposal to include in the treaty commitments for the case of Polish attack, and the Polish envoy W. Grzybowski was informed about the character and content of the treaty before it was signed. In his circular he also explicitly stated that "*the pact reckons with Locarno cases and is not in any way aimed against Poland.*" See AMZV, Telegrams sent in 1935, pp. 262-296/35, Beneš's circular of 17 May (*E. Beneš, Cirkulární telegram* [Circular telegrams], doc. No. 202, p. 232). As reported by Bulgarian envoy D. Kradžalov from Prague, Czechoslovakia's neutrality in case of Polish-Soviet conflict was also required by Bucharest and Belgrade. See I. S. Prasolov, *Československo-sovětská smlouva* [Czechoslovak-Soviet Treaty], p. 117, according to Bulgarian source.

[21] For these contacts see, e.g., Alevtina Pokorná, *Vzájemné vztahy mezi armádami ČSR a SSSR v polovině třicátých let* [Mutual relations between the armies of Czechoslovakia and Soviet Union in the mid-thirties]. In: Historie a vojenství No. 3, 1981, pp. 52-72; Same in: *Vojenské dějiny Československa III. 1919-1939* [Military history of Czechoslovakia III. 1919-1939]. Naše vojsko, Praha 1987, p. 463 ff.

[22] Most recently on this topic Ivan Pfaff, *Sovětská zrada 1938* [The Soviet betrayal of 1938]. Bea, Praha 1993, p. 28 ff.; Same, *Die Sowjetunion und die Verteidigung der Tschechoslowakei*, passim.

ning considerably devalued this component of the Czechoslovak alliance system, and so did also the fact that it failed to be complemented, as undoubtedly anticipated by Czechoslovak diplomatic circles in 1935 with a similar treaty between Romania and the Soviet Union.[23] On the other hand, however, there is no doubt (and the leading Czechoslovak diplomatic officials were well aware of it) that at least outwards the Czechoslovak-Soviet Alliance Treaty, linked to the alliance with France, strengthened the international position of the country. To some extent it could, at least until l936/37, also positively influence the Soviet-Romanian relations, which had been rather strained until the early 1930s.

III

Two dramatic episodes of European politics in the mid-1930s that were caused by the initial aggressive steps of dictators demonstrated to the international public that the democratic Czechoslovakia was taking very seriously the principles of collective security that it had helped develop for years.

Late in September 1935, when Italy's attack against Abyssinia in East Africa became imminent, it was Czechoslovak Foreign Minister Beneš as Chairman of the XVI League of

[23] Romania's Foreign Minister N. Titulescu had many talks with Moscow in 1935-36 on a potential Soviet-Romanian treaty, but due to many reasons these efforts failed (among others, the USSR refused to recognize their Dniester border). The removal of Titulescu from his position of foreign minister was a great blow to this plan in which also some Czechoslovak diplomats were actively involved, particularly Czechoslovak envoy in Bucharest Jan Šeba, and next year the negotiations were then fully suspended. See also Ladislav Deák, *Ke vztahu Rumunska k SSSR v rokoch 1933-36* [On Romania's relations to the USSR in 1933-36]. In: Slovanské štúdie – história, Vol. 10, No. 8, 1966, pp. 111-147; George Cioranesco, *Aspects des relations russo-roumaines*. Minard, Paris 1967, pp. 135-141.

Nations Assembly who was responsible for the fact that the Assembly was not dismissed, but only adjourned. Thus, it could promptly reconvene after the start of Fascist aggression against the East African Empire. And it was under his chairmanship, that the League Council adopted a resolution on 9 October designating Italy as aggressor and approved for the first time in its history sanctions against the aggressor.[24] Beneš made it repeatedly clear, also to Rome, that "*no measure caused by the sanctions is a manifestation of resistance or hostility to Italy, but its only aim is to fulfill the resolution of the Geneva Institution*." At the same time, however, he made it clear that the *"the right way for me, for France and the Little Entente is to act calmly and unprovocatively, but to unconditionally meet the obligations of the League Pact... and to achieve through Anglo-French actions a maximum of new guarantees for the future*".[25] In compliance with this line Czechoslovak diplomacy repeatedly supported in December of that year the motion proposing oil sanctions against Rome that might have constituted a major threat not only to the East Africa campaign, but also to the very existence of the Fascist regime.[26] And a little later it manifested its resolution to protect in a more specific way the existing international order.

[24] See particularly Robert Kvaček, *Nad Evropou zataženo. Československo a Evropa 1933-1937* [Europe overcast. Czechoslovakia and Europe 1933-1937]. Svoboda, Praha 1966, pp. 177-180; see also J. Dejmek, *Edvard Beneš. Politická biografie* [Edvard Beneš. Political biography], Vol. I, pp. 619-623.

[25] AMZV, Praha Fond Telegrams sent in 1935, Nos. 509-544/35, Beneš's circular of 15 October (see also *E. Beneš, Cirkulární telegramy*...[Circular telegrams], doc. No. 208, pp. 239-240). The minister's last Parliament exposé on 5 November of the same year exhibited the same spirit; see Edvard Beneš, *The Struggle for Collective Security in Europe and the Italo-Abyssinian War.* Orbis, Praha 1935, particularly pp. 34-36.

[26] R. Kvaček, *Nad Evropou zataženo* [Europe overcast], p. 180.

When German troops marched in the early hours of 7 March 1936 into the Rhineland, demilitarized in a binding way by the Versailles Treaty, and Hitler simultaneously announced the termination of Locarno Agreements, Beneš – who had already been four months Czechoslovak President[27] – did not hesitate to immediately assure the French titular that Czechoslovakia would join France if it drew consequences of the German action.[28] The new Minister of Foreign Affairs, Kamil Krofta, intimated then the possibility of military conflict to the German envoy and publicly condemned Berlin's action in the Parliament: "*The state whose main principle in foreign policy has always been respect for international commitments and their unconditional observance cannot but resolutely reject the fact that agreements are unilaterally cancelled...*"[29] Nonetheless, the French government (also under the influence of the British government headed by Stanley Baldwin) eventually limited its actions to a mere complaint in Geneva. As a result, Prague had

[27] Beneš became the second Czechoslovak President after a dramatic vote on 18 December 1935. For details see Antonín Klimek, *Boj o Hrad. II. Kdo po Masarykovi?(1926-1935)* [Fight for the Castle. Who will succeed Masaryk? (1926-1935)]. Panevropa, Praha 1998; lately (with slightly different view) J. Dejmek, *Edvard Beneš. Politická biografie* [Edvard Beneš. Political biography], Vol. I., pp. 629-631.

[28] For most details concerning Czechoslovak diplomacy, see Robert Kvaček, *Německá likvidace porýnkého pásma 7. března 1936* [German liquidation of the Rhine Zone on 7 March 1936]. In: Československý časopis historický (ČČH), Vol. 11 [61], No. 3, 1963, pp. 306-330, recently (with list of additional literature) Jindřich Dejmek, *Historik v čele diplomacie: Kamil Krofta 1936-1938. Studie z dějin československé zahraniční politiky ve druhé polovině třicátých let* [A historian at the head of diplomacy: Kamil Krofta 1936-1938. Study into the history of Czechoslovak foreign policy in the latter half of the thirties]. Karolinum, Praha 1998, chap. 1.

[29] Quoted from Kamil Krofta, *Československo a obsazení demilitarizovaného pásma Německem* [Czechoslovakia and the German occupation of demilitarized zone]. Zahraniční politika 1936, pp. 94-95.

to remain reserved, also due to the fact that the attempt to mobilize the Little Entente had failed.[30]

Finally, Czechoslovak diplomacy could not but just demand participation in the expected talks on "a new Locarno" that soon started in the form of notes and "questionnaires" exchanged between London, Paris, and Berlin. Prague officials knew well, as Minister Krofta put it, that the only real guarantee of the existing international order that also Czechoslovakia depended on would be *"an agreement between England, France, Belgium, Little and Balkan Entente, Soviet Union, and perhaps also Italy".* However, such a plan was hardly feasible due to many reasons. The policy of Great Britain, which strongly determined also the positions of France, showed increasing trends toward appeasement as represented, and almost personified by the new Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, whose term of office started in May 1937. France was weakened due to its inner conflicts accompanying the People's Front rule. And Soviet Russia with the accelerating Stalinist terror was not only abandoning the policy of collective security, but its monstrous processes and the reports on its internal developments also repulsed most European democrats from any idea of co-operation.[31]

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[30] *„We shall not take any initiative steps against Germany, our actions will be calm and matter-of-fact-like. We shall neither attack Germany nor provoke it. On the other hand, we shall act loyally and without reservation together with the Little Entente, France, and the other Pact signatories, particularly if England joins use...*" AMZV, Praha, Fond Telegrams sent 1936, Nos. 151-181/36. Krofta´s circular of 9 March. Full text of the document in: *Československá zahraniční politika v roce 1936. Dokumenty československé zahraniční politiky* [Czechoslovak foreign policy in 1936. Documents of Czechoslovak foreign policy]. Ed. Jindřich Dejmek. Vol. A/18/1, Praha 2003, doc. No. 95, pp. 226–227.

[31] The impact of the Stalinist terror on further steps of Soviet diplomacy has been well described by Sabine Dullinová, *Stalinovi diplomaté v Evropě 1930*-1939 [Stalin's diplomats in Europe 1930-1939]. Themis, Praha 2004.

IV

It cannot be denied that even in the extremely complicated situation following the remilitarization of the Rhineland Prague diplomacy made every effort to further improve and reinforce its own already existing alliance system while simultaneously trying to improve the not too good relations to its neighbors. Its efforts were, however, predetermined by the above trends of Great Power policy, and naturally also by their impacts on the political positions of smaller European countries, including the existing allies of Prague. These, like the general political climate in the Old Continent, predetermined the final failure of most of the diplomatic activities launched by Czernin Palace in 1936-1937.

The most important of these initiatives was certainly the project of *integrated Little Entente Pact* proposed by President Beneš late in summer 1936 and submitted by Minister Krofta to his counterparts, the Yugoslav Prime Minister Milan Stojadinovič and the Romanian Foreign Minister Victor Antonescu[32] at the Little Entente conference held in Bratislava in September of that year. The project was intended to convert the existing anti-Hungarian defensive commitments of alliance treaties into universal commitments in any case "*d´une agression non-provoquée...*", i.e., extend them to the case of German attack.[33] Nevertheless, the Yugoslav Prime Minister,

[32] Early in September 1936 he succeeded Nicolae Titulescu, supporter of collective security, including co-operation with the USSR.

[33] Text of the proposal available in AMZV, Praha, Fond Telegrams sent in 1936, Nos. 631-632/36, *Protocole portant précision des engagements en viguer entre les Etats de la Petite Entente*, Krofta to Bucharest and Belgrade on 9 September 1936; see also *Československá zahraniční politika v roce 1936. Dokumenty československé zahraniční politiky* [Czechoslovak foreign policy in 1936. Documents of Czechoslovak foreign policy]. Ed. Jindřich Dejmek in cooperation with Jan Němeček. Vol. A/18/2, Praha 2003, doc. No. 334, pp. 10–12.

who was following his own political line of approaching the dynamic powers, including Germany, actually refused to sign the pact by demanding that its implementation be delayed until the conclusion of the then planned "new Locarno" conference, that is actually ad calendas graecas...[34]

A similar story is the fate of another project, that of integrated pact of the Little Entente with France that had also been discussed from summer 1936 and finally proposed from Paris in November of the same year.[35] Quai d´Orsay linked its signing to the condition of aid to Czechoslovakia also by Yugoslavia and Romania in case of aggression, which caused another refusal sent from Belgrade to the metropolis on the Vltava and to that on the Seine and which was also encouraged by German, Italian, and (as we know today) British diplomacy.[36] Also the attempts of leading officials of Czechoslovak foreign policy to improve the country's relations to its neighbors, which were – except Austria and the allied Romania – rather strained, proved unsuccessful. When Krofta tried in July 1936 during his personal meeting in Geneva with his Polish counterpart Beck to discuss the Polish complaints concerning Czecho-

[34] For details see Ladislav Deák, *Zápas o strednú Europu 1933-1938* [Struggle for Central Europe 1933-1938]. Veda, Bratislava 1987, pp. 183-188.

[35] Text available in Documents Diplomatique Francais, II. ser. Vol. IV, doc. No. 9, pp. 9-11, and No. 281, pp. 465-467. For more information, see L. Deák, *Pokusy o upevnenije molodohodového spojenectva s Francúzkom v rokoch 1936-1937* [Attempts to strengthen the Little Entente's alliance with France in 1936-1937]. In: Slovanské štúdie-história, No. 13, 1972, pp. 88-110; latest details in Vuk Vinaver, *Jugoslavija i Francuska izmedju dva rata* [Yugoslavia and France in the Inter-war period]. ISI, Beograd 1986, pp. 325-330.

[36] See, e.g., Živko Avramovski, *Stanovisko Anglicka k projektu Paktu o vzájomnej pomoci medzi Francúzskom a Malou dohodou* [England's position in relation to the project of Pact on Mutual Assistance between France and the Little Entente]. In: Historický časopis, Vol. 22, No. 3, 1974, pp. 419-438, and other studies by same author.

slovakia and to arrive at their "friendly informal settlement", no real improvement of mutual relations occurred in spite of the seemingly promising beginning.[37] No positive results were achieved, either, by the mediating diplomatic (and also military) efforts of France taking place in 1936-37, the last attempt being the circular tour of the metropolises of France's Eastern allies made by Foreign Minister Yvon Delbos late in 1937.

A failure was also the – now well known – attempt made by President Beneš to achieve through secret talks with the German emissaries of Ribbentrop's Dienststelle, Albrecht Haushofer and K. Trauttmansdorf, at least a certain *détente* with Berlin. After two rounds of top secret preliminary talks taking place in November and December 1936 in Prague Czechoslovak diplomats prepared a draft text of Czechoslovak-German non-aggression treaty based on the mutual arbitration agreement of 1925 and leaving untouched the alliance commitments of each party. It was stressed that each party "*shall in every respect honor the sovereignty of the other party and its undisturbed performance on its entire state territory, and shall not interfere in the other party's internal matters*."[38]

[37] See AMZV, Praha, Fond Cabinet 1936, Minutes of meetings between K. Krofta and J. Beck on 29. 6. and 1. 7. 1936 in Geneva; more on this in J. Dejmek, *Historik v čele diplomacie. Kamil Krofta* [Historian at the head of diplomacy. Kamil Krofta], passim.

[38] Text of the proposal available, e.g., in: Edvard Beneš, *Paměti. Od Mnichova k nové válce a k novému vítězství* [Memoirs. From Munich to a new war and to a new victory]. Orbis, Praha 1947, pp. 33-35. Of the large literature available let us mention at least the fundamental study by Robert Kvaček, *Československo-německá jednání v roce 1936* [Czechoslovak-German talks in 1936]. In. Historie a vojenství, 1965, No. 5., pp. 721-754, with some details complemented by Michal Pułaski, *Stosunki dyplomatyczne polsko-czechosłowacko-niemieckie od roku 1933 do wiosny 1938*. Instytut Zachodni, Poznań 1967, pp. 131-154; latest summary in: Jindřich Dejmek, *Edvard Beneš. Politická biografie českého demokrata:* Část II. *Prezident republiky a vůdce národního odboje (1935-1948)* [Edvard Beneš. Political biography of

Naturally, Hitler was not interested in a document that would complicate at the level of international law his intention to destroy Czechoslovakia. Although Krofta until spring 1937 in his parliament speeches signaled Prague's readiness to restart negotiations with Berlin in the spirit of previous offers, the negotiations were not resumed, which is understandable in view of the later events. A plan of military attack against Czechoslovakia, known as "Fall Grün", was already being prepared at that time in Berlin and Hitler did not want to complicate his next actions with additional acts of international law, although they – as later proved by the fate of a number of similar documents – did not constitute any major obstacle to the expansion plans of the Nazi dictator.

In the long-term perspective, the only – at least limited – successful of Krofta's Prague initiatives was his effort aimed at certain normalization of Prague's relations with Budapest. Since mid-1936 there was a chance for Prague to try to achieve a political *détente* with its south-eastern neighbor by making use of the question of Hungary's rearmament. This was forbidden by the Peace Treaty of Trianon, and it was also blocked by the still homogeneous Little Entente front; nevertheless, it became hot after a similar step taken by Austria. Krofta therefore intended to propose to Sándor Palace a potential annulment of the Trianon demilitarization clauses *qui pro quo,* in exchange for a countercommitment of non-aggression on the part of the Horthy regime. In spite of the failure of preliminary talks at the turn of 1936 Krofta as Chairman of the Little Entente Standing Council resumed the negotiations in May 1937, and after many problems, pauses and interruptions he could successfully accomplish – at least partly – the talks in August 1938 at the last Little Entente conference in Bled, Slovenia.

a Czech democrat: Part II. President of the Republic and leader of national resistance (1935-1948)]. Karolinum, Praha 2008, pp. 46-53.

On 20 August, three protocols were approved in Bled by which Budapest, in exchange for the recognition of Hungary's right to rearmament and for some – rather vague – promises in the matter of Hungarian minorities in the Little Entente member countries, declared its *"firm will not to use force in any case in relation"* to any of the three alliance states.[39] In spite of the fact that Hungarian diplomacy started questioning soon afterwards the validity of this document in relation to Prague, it is an undisputed fact (and Hitler's first reaction to "Bled" confirms it) that the protocols signed on the eve of Czechoslovakia's struggle for its very existence revived the Little Entente commitments, at least in the initial, anti-Hungarian spirit, which tied Budapest's hands in its activities during the whole September crisis.[40]

The Bled Protocols were in fact the last, though partial success of Czechoslovak diplomacy in securing its state as well as the existing Central European structures within which Czecho-

[39] The texts of protocol see in: AMZV, Praha, Fond Section II, Little Entente 1938, Bled, 21 et 22 Aout, *Projet du Protocol*...; also *Československá zahraniční politika v roce 1938. Dokumenty československé zahraniční politiky* [Czechoslovak foreign policy in 1938. Documents of Czechoslovak foreign policy]. Eds. Jindřich Dejmek in cooperation with Jan Němeček, Helena Nováčková and Ivan Šťovíček. Vol. A/20/2, Praha 2001, doc. No. 491 through 494, pp. 162–164.

Much literature is available on the negotiations, such as Vuk Vinaver, *Jugoslavija i Madjarska 1933-1941.* Narodna knjiga, Beograd 1977; Magda Adám, *Richtung Selbstvernichtung. Die Kleine Entente*. Korvina Verlag, Budapest 1988, p. 112 ff; differently J. Dejmek, *Historik v čele diplomacie. Kamil Krofta* [Historian at the head of diplomacy], chap. 4. and 5.

[40] The protocols are viewed in this spirit, e.g., by Robert Kvaček, *Podíl Československa na jednáních Malé dohody a Maďarska v letech 1936-38* [Czechoslovakia's contributioin to the negotiations between the Little Entente and Hungary in 1936-1938]. In. Historický časopis, Vol. 11, 1963, pp. 406-432, differently P. S. Wandycz, *The Little Entente: Sixty Years Later.* In. Slavonic and East European Affaires, Vol. 59, 1981, pp. 548-564. More recently in: same author, *Z dziejów dyplomacji.* Polonia, Londyn 1988, p. 130.

slovakia had emerged and existed. Czernin Palace could not achieve any positive results more; actually, a contrary is true. The existing ties were rapidly weakening, the maneuvering space, already limited, continued declining. A great blow to the Czechoslovak-French-Soviet alliance was the series of the above mentioned Moscow processes that were accompanied by apparent "isolationism" of the USSR, and naturally also by increasing mistrust between Moscow and Paris.[41] Czechoslovakia's international position was also weakened by the inner instability of France that had only seemingly ended with the formation of Edouard Daladier's cabinet in April 1938, and by the increasing foreign political obedience of Paris in relation to London, in whose diplomatic efforts as of autumn 1937 the policy of appeasement had fully prevailed.[42] A heavy blow to Prague's Central European efforts was the Anschluss of Austria in March 1938 and the failure of the last attempts of rapprochement with Warsaw a little later.[43] Prague had already by that time faced not only hostile campaigns in Berlin, but since spring 1938 also an increasing pressure by British, and also French diplomacy in favor of more and more concessions to the already fully Nazi-controlled German minority.

[41] For more on this, see I. Pfaff, *Die Sowjetunion und die Verteidigung der Tschechoslowakei*, particularly p. 217 ff.

[42] Viewed in broad horizon by Robert Kvaček, *Obtížné spojenectví. Politicko-diplomatické vztahy mezi Československem a Francií 1937-1938* [Difficult alliance. Political and diplomatic relations between Czechoslovakia and France 1937-1938]. Karolinum, Praha 1989, passim.

[43] On the first problem, see Robert Kvaček, *Československo a anšlus Rakouska* [Czechoslovakia and the Anschluss of Austria]. In. Studie z obecných dějin. Sborník k 70. narozeninám prof. dr. J. Charváta. Karolinum, Praha 1975, pp. 209-222; on the Polish question, see Henryk Bułhak, *Próba czechosłowackich kół wojskowych nawiązania rozmów sojuszniczych z polskim sztabem głównym w marcu 1938 r.* In: Studia z Dziejów ZSRR i Europy Środkowej, Tom 15, 1979, pp. 205-210.

V

The most apparent manifestation of the determination of Czechoslovak political representation headed by President Beneš (and also by generals) to defend the country was the weekend crisis of late May 1938. Czechoslovak envoy to Berlin, Vojtěch Mastný, had repeatedly warned Czernin Palace that Germany might use potential riots in the border areas during the planned local elections as a pretext of intervention.[44] When information from different sources (not only from intelligence services) was received in Prague on an alleged movement of German troops toward the Czechoslovak border, Beneš and the Government responded with limited military countermeasures, including mobilization of one year of reservists and occupation of the (incomplete) border forts.[45] It is known to us now that Hitler did not plan a military attack at that time; nevertheless, as mentioned by the British historian William Wallace, an improvised attack of the Wehrmacht in case of collisions in Sudetenland was not out of question, and the Czechoslovak leaders therefore responded. This countermeasure, viewed from a short-time perspective, proved to be a success, reinforced with diplomatic interventions of western ambassadors in Berlin, but in the long-time horizon it turned out to be harmful for both the Government and Beneš.[46]

[44] See report by envoy V. Mastný from Berlin on 18 May 1938. In: *Československá zahraniční politika v roce 1938. Dokumenty československé zahraniční politiky* [Czechoslovak foreign policy in 1938. Documents of Czechoslovak foreign policy]. Eds. Jindřich Dejmek in cooperation with Jan Němeček, Helena Nováčková and Ivan Šťovíček. Vol. A/20/1, Praha 2000, doc. No. 290, pp. 446–447.

[45] See, e.g., *Vojenské dějiny Československa III. díl (1918-1938)* [Military history of Czechoslovakia. Part III. (1918-1938)]. Naše vojsko, Praha 1987, pp. 484-487; see also J. Dejmek, *Edvard Beneš. Politická biografie* [Edvard Beneš. Political biography], Vol. II, chap. 18, pp. 115-118.

[46] See William V. Wallace, *The Making of the May Crisis of 1938*. In: Slavonic and East European Review, Vol. 41, No. 97, 1963, pp. 368-390;

Historians know well today that a part of British diplomacy (and British elite in general) viewed the post-Versailles system from the very beginning with reservations, in case of Czechoslovakia (and its neighbor country, Poland) primarily with regard to the position of national minorities in those countries. Until 1936, the situation of Sudeten Germans was not demonized by Nazi propaganda. Now, however, it became a welcomed tool in Hitler's hands to destroy Czechoslovakia and the Reichsgerman policy found a very useful ally in the Sudetengerman Party (SdP) representing from the elections of May 1935 more than three fifths of the German population in Czechoslovakia. Its leader, Konrad Henlein, whose activities had been from the very beginning subsidized by the Reich, succeeded in 1935-37 in convincing British diplomats (as well as a part of politicians in the metropolis on the Thames) that it was the situation of Sudeten Germans that might become one of the causes of collision in Central Europe.[47] Irrespective of the real situation of minorities in the country (Germans had two or three representatives in the Prague government since 1926) this approach proved fateful to the country's credit in a part of the western public opinion.

Already in the period of accelerating "active" appeasement in autumn 1937 the British Government considered the

different interpretation offered by Gerhard L. Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany. II. Starting World War II*. Chicago / London 1981, p. 367 ff.

[47] See, e.g., Jaroslav Kučera, *Mezi Wilhelmstrasse a Thunovskou. Finanční podpora Německé říše Sudetoněmecké straně 1935-1938* [Between Wilhelmstrasse and Thunovská Street. Financial support of the Sudetengerman Party by the German Reich 1935-1938]. In: ČČH, Vol. 95, No. 2, 1997, pp. 387-410.; for Henlein's British contacts, see Jindřich Dejmek, *Britská diplomacie, Československo a Sudetoněmecká strana* [British diplomacy, Czechoslovakia, and the Sudetengerman Party]. In: Moderní dějiny, Vol. 9, No. 9, 2001, pp. 161-236.

"Sudeten German problem" (in addition to that of Austria and Danzig/Gdańsk) one of the obstacles to anticipated "reconciliation" between the West and Germany. Lord Halifax, a member of the Chamberlain government, made it later clear to Nazi leaders during his ill-conceived trip to Germany in November 1937 that Britain would not oppose a "solution" to these questions provided it was done in a peaceful way.[48] Simultaneously, British diplomacy exerted increasing pressure on the Prague Government and the President to make as many concessions to Henlein as possible. British representatives were starting from a totally false assumption that the SdP leader was not Nazi.[49] Another fatal circumstance for the Czechoslovaks was the fact that as of spring 1938 the British policy in this matter was fully shared also by France, an allied country; this (in view of the developments in the USSR) reduced the maneuvering chances of Czechoslovak leaders practically to zero.

The government headed by Milan Hodža was preparing since March 1938, based on some previous projects, a Nationality statute, a series of bills increasing the rights of national minorities based on the principle of individual civil freedoms and a far-reaching cultural and administrative autonomy. However, when Henlein's SdP published in April of the same year its "minimal" Carlsbad program containing eight points,

[48] See, e.g., Andrew Roberts, *The Holy Fox*. A Life of Lord Halifax. Phoenix, London 1992, pp. 70-74; also Jindřich Dejmek, *Nenaplněné naděje. Politické a diplomatické vztahy Československa a Velké Británie (1918-1938)* [Unfulfilled hopes. Political and diplomatic relations between Czechoslovakia and Great Britain (1918-1938)]. Karolinum, Praha 2003, pp. 232-234.

[49] Ironically, Henlein almost simultaneously with Halifax's visit to Germany wrote a confidential message to Hitler in which he accepted Nazism and even declared that the goal of his political movement was to incorporate the whole Bohemia in the German Reich. See *Die Deutschen in der Tschechoslowakei 1933-1947. Dokumentensammlung.* Ed. Václav Král. Nakladatelství Československé Akademie Věd, Praha 1964, p. 83, pp. 140-145.

British diplomacy through its pressure actually prevented the approval of the bills and tried to make Prague representatives seek a compromise with the SdP demands.[50] Then, late in July 1938, Beneš was literally forced to receive an "independent" mediator, Vicomte W. Runciman and his team, who tried from the beginning of August to achieve a similar compromise, but at the cost of increased concessions to be made by the Czechoslovak President and "his" administration.[51] Still, no progress could be reached in the negotiations with the SdP. Beneš yielded to the British pressure also in order to make the German party fully responsible for the anticipated failure of the talks with Henlein's delegates.

VI

The course of the September 1938 crisis shows quite clearly, how little the Czechoslovak policy pursued by the President could influence the movement of the gearwheels between Nazi expansionism and British appeasement. In his "Fourth Plan" Beneš yielded in his concessions to the SdP to the very limit still compatible with the existence of a functioning state. The Sudeten radicals (backed by Hitler, of course), however, were

[50] Which was, of course, impossible, because Henlein had already in March 1938 accepted Hitler's instruction to raise such requirements that the Prague government could not really meet. In extreme case he was to require a change of the country's foreign policy. See *So oder So. Řešení české otázky podle německých dokumentů 1933-1945* [Solution to the Czech question according to German documents 1933-1945]. Ed. Bořivoj Čelovský. Sfinga Ostrava 1995, p. 146; also *Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik.* ser. D, Vol. II, doc. No. 109.

[51] For recent details, see Paul Vyšný, *The Runciman Mission to Czechoslovakia 1938*. Prelude to Munich. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, Hampshire, London 2003.

already striving for different goals.[52] While some Britons, including Runciman, wanted to use the approval of the plan to launch *rapprochement* efforts with Berlin (and Henlein seemed to be a suitable mediator for them), their "partners" wearing swastikas on sleeves were already seeking a pretext to break the talks and start aggression. After a provoked incident in Ostrava on 7 September the SdP interrupted the talks. Hitler's speech on 12 September at the NSDAP Congress taking in Nuremberg was followed by an attempt of rebellion in some border areas of Bohemia and Moravia, including brutal attacks of Sudetengerman guerillas against Czechoslovak authorities. The deployment of Czechoslovak armed forces could suppress very soon the uprising. However, the leading SdP representatives fled to Germany where on the Leipzig radio on 14 September they declared that the Sudeten Germans were "longing to return" to the Nazi Reich, "heim ins Reich".[53] No immediate attack against Czechoslovakia was produced by these events yet (it was planned in Berlin to start at the turn of September), but they were followed by "countermeasures" taken by the British government that eventually led to the negotiating table in Munich.

The British Prime Minister, who went on 14 September to see Hitler for the first time, accepted at their first meeting in Berchtesgaden the principle of cession of the Czechoslovak territories with German majority to the Reich, so that from *his* point of view the whole following political crisis resulted from

[52] See, e.g., Johann W. Brügel, *Czechoslovakia before Munich. The German Minority Problem and British Appeasement Policy*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1973; summary is also available in: J. Dejmek, *Edvard Beneš. Politická biografie* [Political biography], Vol. II., chap. XVIII, p. 121 ff.

[53] *Ibid.*; for the declaration, see the collection: *Die Deutschen in der Tschechoslowakei 1933-1947. Dokumentensammlung*, doc. No. 219, p. 307.

the "troubles" related to the cession modalities (as mentioned by him in one of his letters to Hitler) and not to the essence of the problem.[54] When he succeeded at the subsequent Anglo-French summit meeting in London (17– 18 September) in obtaining Daladier's support for this plan, the fate of Czechoslovakia in its existing form was sealed. Beneš and the Czechoslovak government rejected the Anglo-French Plan of 19 September requiring Czechoslovakia's consent to the cession of its territories with alleged German majority and they tried to gain more maneuvering space by suggesting negotiations in the spirit of the Czechoslovak-German Arbitration Agreement of October 1925.[55] The explicit threat by the western envoys expressed during their night-time demarche to the President in the Prague Castle, that in the case of apparent conflict Czechoslovakia would have to face Germany alone and moreover would bear responsibility for such conflict, eliminated the will to resist of the majority of political representation. Thus, it was already at that time, on 21 September, that the general principle of settlement was agreed on, namely territorial losses in exchange for promised guarantees, which was the model that later became a basis of the decisions made in Munich.[56]

Next week, when another Chamberlain's meeting with Hitler in Godesberg failed, Beneš, most of the Czechoslovak

[54] See, e.g., Robert A. C. Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement. British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, London 1993, Chap. 8, particularly pp. 163-166; J. Dejmek, *Nenaplněné naděje* [Unfulfilled hopes], chap. XV.

[55] *Československá zahraniční politika v roce* 1938 [Czechoslovak foreign policy in 1938]. Vol. A/20/2, doc. No. 651, pp. 343–345. For the President's reflections of these moments, see: Edvard Beneš, *Mnichovské dny. Paměti* [The Munich days. Memoirs]. Svoboda, Praha 1968, pp. 258-267.

[56] See the text of Czechoslovak reply in: *Československá zahraniční politika v roce* 1938 [Czechoslovak foreign policy in 1938], Vol. A/20/2, doc. No. 664, pp. 359-360.

political representation, and particularly the top Army officials expressed their readiness to defend their country. From 23 September on there was a successful general mobilization during which almost one and half million soldiers were armed and operationally deployed. This constituted undoubtedly a great complication to some premises of the German plan "Grün", namely the factor of surprising attack. Prague diplomacy activated also other allies and thus succeeded in eliminating for the time being the threat on the part of Hungary and partly also of Poland, in relation to which Prague tried to use "the Russian card".[57] Chamberlain, however, irrespective of the growing resistance to his policy even in his own Cabinet, continued his efforts aimed at "saving peace at any cost", and the anti-appeasement opposition either in Britain or in France (that Beneš so much relied on) was not strong enough to influence dramatically the given course of events. The tragic situation of Czechoslovakia at the moment of having deployed its armed forces is well illustrated by the imperatives coming from London and Paris warning Czechoslovakia not to try to get back its territories that it had agreed to cede by accepting the plan of 21 September.[58] In spite of that, Beneš reckoned with war until 29 September, i.e., until the Munich summit conference,

[57] SSSR warned the Polish ambassador already in the morning of 23 September that Poland's participation in any aggression against Czechoslovakia would mean "*tearing up*" the non-aggression treaty of 1932. Four days later, envoy Fierlinger reported that under favorable conditions "*the Soviets will try to achieve a common border with us*"; i.e., they would militarily occupy the south-eastern part of Poland. AMZV, Praha, Fond TD 1938, No. 961; also *Československá zahraniční politika v roce* 1938 [Czechoslovak foreign policy in 1938]. Vol. A/20/2, doc. No. 736, p. 418.

[58] Anyway, the British endeavored to make Czechoslovaks accept prior to the Munich summit conference a "time-table" of "evacuation" of a part of their territory irrespective of the fact that most of the border fortifications were located there.

and he acted correspondingly, including a request of Soviet air support (the request has not been fully explained yet).[59] Munich with its consequences, however, and the attitude of other countries, namely Poland and Hungary, created a totally new political situation where there was no hope of defense within a broader alliance.

The Czechoslovak President and the Government headed by General Jan Syrový faced in the fateful morning of 30 September a dilemma of having to choose between two alternatives only; other suggestions that appear from time to time are pure speculations mostly ignoring the international context. They could either accept the document agreed on in the Bavarian metropolis *as a whole*, including the international guarantees promised by the signatories (and also with some hope to achieve a better territorial solution as the final borderline was to be set later by an international commission in Berlin). Or to reject it and face an aggression by the Nazi Power, which would certainly be seconded by Hungary and – certainly in the region of Těšín – also by Poland. The Czechoslovak Army, however, was not prepared for this type of isolated defense (all Czechoslovak military plans relied on an intervention of major allies). Moreover, no one was able to answer the question what would happen after the more or less probable occupation of Czecho-

[59] The only reliable source related to this step continues to be the confirmation by envoy Z. Fierlinger in Moscow that he transmitted the request to Soviet authorities, *Československá zahraniční politika v roce* 1938 [Czechoslovak foreign policy in 1938]. Vol. A/20/2, doc. No. 754, p. 432. However, no reaction is available in Czechoslovak documentation, although it is possible that the development was too rapid. Nevertheless, the study of available Soviet and/or Russian sources has revealed that the Soviet Union was actually not willing to take any isolated action to support Czechoslovakia. See, e.g., Zara Steiner, *The Soviet Commissariat of Foreign Affairs and the Czechoslovak Crisis in 1938: New Material from Soviet Archives*. In: Historical Journal, Vol. 42, No. 3, 1999, pp. 751-780.

slovak territory by the Wehrmacht. Beneš's statement at the Government meeting *"...we would wage an honest war, but we would lose our independence and the nation would perish..."* was no exaggeration in the light of the following events and, in particular, of the Nazi concept of "total" war. This fact, as well as the Polish ultimatum, was probably the most important argument making the Prague political representation accept "the Munich (Agreement)" on the same day.[60] This caused then drastic geographic (and naturally also economic and strategic) losses of the country, and soon also a dramatic shift of the political face of the reduced country whose existence ended with the eventual Nazi occupation of the Bohemian Lands in March 1939, which was one of the key moments on Europe's way toward another war.

[60] Moreover, Beneš was convinced, and this was to be confirmed by the following events, that Germany's further aggressions would provoke a Pan-European war that would make it possible to revise the Munich Agreement. See J. Dejmek, *Edvard Beneš. Politická biografie* [Edvard Beneš. Political biography], Vol. II, chap. XVIII, pp. 173-180.

History of the Czechoslovak-Romanian Alliance with Respect to the Little Entente. The Beginning of Diplomatic Relations between Czechoslovakia and Romania and the Emergence of the Little Entente

Miroslav Tejchman

The disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy at the very end of World War I could solve some hot ethnic and social problems in Central and Southeastern Europe, primarily through the creation of successor states. However, new problems emerged in those countries and added to the existing ones that had been inherited from the old Monarchy. Such problems were particularly hot in Czechoslovakia, the Kingdom of Serbs, Coats and Slovenes, and in Romania.

The new Czechoslovak state, which through the process of its emergence, and primarily through the ways of European diplomacy in the final part of the Great War was predestined for the sphere of interest of France, needed allies among small countries in its part of Europe, where there was from the Baltic Sea down to the Mediterranean Sea a large power vacuum between the war-devastated Germany and the new Bolshevik government that did not conceal its plans of exporting the proletarian revolution to Europe.

The Kingdom of SCS became a natural ally already before the end of the war. The contacts of Czechs and Slovaks with the South Slavs had a long tradition, which continued in the cooperation between the Czechoslovak representatives in exile with both the Serbian government and the exiled South Slav

politicians from Austria-Hungary, and also in a large cooperation in military matters.[1]

Another logical ally of the new Czechoslovak Republic was supposed to be the Kingdom of Romania. Actually, an agreement on this was achieved before the Czechoslovak Republic was created as a result of similar negotiations like those that had been held with South Slavs during the war.

Many years ago, the Nestor of Czech balkanists and author of the first Czech-written History of Romania, Professor Josef Macůrek, pointed to the frequent mutual contacts between Czechs, Slovaks and Romanians in many fields, namely political, cultural, and economic, in the past. Thus, in Romania, a country seemingly remote to the Slavic character of Czechoslovakia, there already existed a considerable tradition of mutual co-operation (although certainly incomparable to the relation between Czechoslovaks and South Slavs).[2]

In his work "Světová válka a naše revoluce" (The World War and our Revolution) written in 1935 Dr. Edvard Beneš said on this: *"As soon as they entered the war* [in 1916 – MT],

[1] Miroslav Tejchman, *Češi a Jihoslované na společné cestě ke svobodě za první světové války* [Czechs and South Slavs on a common road to freedom in World War I]. In: Ladislav Hladký (ed.), Vznik samostatného československého a jihoslovanského státu v r. 1918 [Origins of the independent Czechoslovak and Yugoslav states in 1918]. Brno 1990, pp. 99-119. Most recently: Tomáš Chrobák, Jana Hrabcová, *Česko-srbské vztahy* [Czech-Serbian relations].In: Ladislav Hladký et al., Vztahy Čechů s národy a zeměmi jihovýchodní Evropy [Relations between the Czechs and the countries of Southeastern Europe]. Historický ústav, Praha 2010, pp. 97-124.

[2] Miroslav Tejchman, *Nástin česko-rumunských vztahů* [Outline of Czech-Romanian relations]. In: Kurt W. Treptow (ed.), Dějiny Rumunska [History of Romania]. Lidové noviny, Praha 2000, pp. 397-432; most recently: Filip Šisler, Miroslav Tejchman, *Česko-rumunské vztahy* [Czech-Romanian relations]. In: Ladislav Hladký et al., Vztahy Čechů s národy a zeměmi jihovýchodní Evropy, pp. 197-220.

we considered them our close allies and we therefore sought contacts with them in Paris and London"[3].

Apart from the contacts of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, Edvard Beneš, Štefan Osuský and other Czechoslovak representatives with Romanian politicians, namely Take Ionescu and Nicolae Titulescu, and their talks in London in 1917 where a common post-war policy was discussed, also the first contacts in military matters were established.[4] In October 1917, upon invitation by King Ferdinand I., Masaryk as the top representative of the Czechoslovak resistance movement visited Jasy, the temporary capital of Romania. He was received with all honors due to a head of state and the poet Octavian Goga wrote in the official newspaper România: *"It is our wish that our distinguished guest consider these days to be a prelude to the time of new order after our common victory when our two reunited nations will see in their normal life two points of mutual support of their fate: Prague and in Bucharest"*.[5]

With the emergence of the Czechoslovak Republic in the end of October 1918, of the Kingdom of SCS early in December, and of Great Romania it became possible to materialize the ideas of new order in Central and East Europe where the bloc of successor states could oppose Hungarian revisionism

[3] Edvard Beneš, *Světová válka a naše revoluce II.*[The world war and our revolution II.]. Orbis, Praha 1935, p. 102.

[4] Miroslav Tejchman, *Československo-rumunská spolupráce v letech první světové války a po vzniku jednotlivých národních států* 1914-1921 [Czechoslovak-Romanian co-operation during the First World War and after the emergence of particular national states 1914-1921]. In: Sborník k problematice dějin imperialismu [Collected studies into the history of imperialism], Vol. 14, Praha 1982, p. 149 ff; prior to that: Miroslav Tejchman, *Počátek diplomatických vztahů československo-rumunských* [The beginning of Czechoslovak-Romanian diplomatic relations]. In: Slovanský přehled, Vol. 57, No. 4, 1971, pp. 273–280.

[5] Quoted from Ioan Saizu, Zdeněk Kutina, *Cesta T. G. Masaryka do Jasů* [T. G. Masaryk's trip to Jasy]. Slovanský přehled, Vol. 55, No. 4, 1969, pp. 314-315.

and perhaps also resist some expected efforts of the Entente Powers to change the status quo thus created.[6]

The first unofficial Czechoslovak military mission headed by Captain Emil Švec arrived at Budapest early in November 1918. Its primary task was to accomplish the repatriation of Czechoslovak soldiers from Romania and to protect as much as possible citizens of the new state and their property. The situation of the military mission to Romania was complicated by the fact that there was no legal document by the Czechoslovak government delimiting the competences of the mission. The attempts to create similar "missions" in the territories newly attached to Romania, namely in Bessarabia's Kishinev and Bukovina's Chernovtsy, failed because there were no diplomatic relations between Czechoslovakia and Romania at that time and the Czechoslovak Republic was not recognized de iure yet.

From January 1919 on a temporary Czechoslovak consulate was available in the Romanian capital to organize primarily the repatriation of Czechoslovak citizens.

At the same time, an unofficial Czechoslovak representation in Romania was established, headed by Major Jaroslav Čermák who was assisted by Dr. Ferdinand Veverka, an experienced diplomat from Austro-Hungarian diplomatic services in the pre-war time. However, the countries still failed to be officially recognized de iure, and there was no agreement available on the office head enjoying the diplomatic envoy rights. Čermák was appointed "authorized special representative of the Czechoslovak Republic to Romania" on 16 January 1919, but he did not start work in Bucharest until March. His position was hampered by the fact that his mission was not supported by any authorization on the part of his government.

[6] Miroslav Tejchman, *Relații cehoslovaco-române în anii 20.* [*The Czech-Romanian Relationes during 20's*]. In: Sistemul politic din România și Cehoslovacia și colaborarea româno-cehoslovacă în anii 1920-1930. București 1983, p. 38.

It was only after several Čermák's requests that Foreign Minister Edvard Beneš informed his Romanian counterpart on 11 August 1919 that the Prague Government was delegating its authorized representative Ing. Bohumil Čermák in the position of diplomatic agent authorized to establish a permanent Czechoslovak representation in Bucharest. Three days later, Beneš asked in another letter for Čermák's agrément, who – based on Czechoslovakia's recognition by Romania – was designated as a Czechoslovak envoy to Romania.

As an act establishing diplomatic relations between the Czechoslovak Republic and the Kingdom of Romania can be viewed the affirmative reply from Bucharest of 1 September 1919 delivered by the Romanian Legation in Paris to the Czechoslovak representation office in the French capital. The agrément granted can be considered an undisputed evidence of the establishment of diplomatic relations.

It was only on 30 January 1920 that the first Czechoslovak envoy and minister plenipotentiary Bohumil Čermák could present his letters of credence at an audience with King Ferdinand I. In his introductory speech he stressed that *"the Romanian and the Czechoslovak nations are not estranged from each other,"* and he also expressed the conviction that the two countries would co-operate in full agreement on the peaceful work. The Romanian King also stressed in his reply the necessity of co-operation on the peaceful work and underlined the common interests.[7]

On the Romanian side, as of February 1919 a delegate of the Romanian government with the Czechoslovak government was Constantin Isopescu Grecul (officially he took up his po-

[7] Archiv ministerstva zahraničních věcí (AMZV), Praha [Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, Prague], Fond Politické zprávy [Political reports; further PZ] Bucharest, 1920, Čermák from Bucharest No. 140/L of 04. 02.1920.

sition of "head of special diplomatic mission" on 8 February). His name appeared for the first time on the list of Prague diplomatic corps members on 7 May 1919 followed by a remark "not officially".

From the beginning of 1919 a special authorized representative of the Czechoslovak National Assembly in Bucharest (within Čermák's office) was Dr Ferdinand Veverka, who already on 1 April 1919 submitted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Prague and to President T. G. Masaryk a large memorandum informing about his previous activities in the Romanian capital city and, in particular, supporting with all the authority of experienced diplomat and expert the ideas of Beneš's foreign policy concerning the new organization of Central Europe. *"To reorganize Central and Southeastern Europe means in our program to achieve that this center* [Bucharest - M.T.] *be firmly tied to the Central European Group in the narrow sense of the word, whose political center we want to be and through which we only can become an integral part of global policy."*[8] This new Central Europe, as explained by Veverka, was not only expected to constitute a barrier against Teutonism, but also to become a cultural and economic binder between the West and the East. Bohemia in this combination was supposed to be a stabilizing element in Central Europe while Romania in the eastern part of the Balkans; Bohemia as a protective barrier to the Teutonic expansionism, Romania to the decay coming from the East. In mid-April, however, Veverka was appointed secretary of the Czechoslovak Legation to London.

Similar spirit was also shown in the declaration of the Czechoslovak commercial representation in Bucharest of 20 February 1919 pointing out that Romania was an "excellent economic territory" for Czechoslovakia that can hardly be equaled.

[8] AMZV, Praha, Fond PZ Bucharest, 1918, Memorandum of 01. 04. 1919.

As of spring 1919 big Czechoslovak companies were trading with Romania on the basis of compensation agreements; in summer, a Czechoslovak Romanian agreement on railway transport was signed as well as some other bilateral agreements. In March 1919 a special commission of the Romanian Ministry of Industry and Commerce arrived in Bratislava and the first preliminary economic negotiations started that were then followed by concrete talks on a trade agreement in January and February 1920 in Prague. It was signed in Bucharest one year later. [9]

Of increased importance appeared to be the necessity to concretize the political relations. Although T. G. Masaryk, T. Ionescu, N. Titulescu, V. Marinković and S. Hadžić had agreed in Jasy in October 1917 on postwar co-operation and although at the 1919 Peace Conference the same topic was repeatedly mentioned by E. Beneš, Š. Osuský, Ion I. C. Brătianu, T. Ionescu and A. Trumbić, the concretization of stable political relations was dragging on in the early twenties. First, there were problems with the Hungarian revisionism and the intervention against the Hungarian Republic of Councils, then the plans of the Powers, mainly France, to potentially restructure the Central-Eastern area, including Austria and Hungary (the Danube Federation Plan). In view of such changes, the three governments were in agreement on how to respond to them. They also shared the ideas as to the future Little Entente and its harmonized policy.

Faster consolidation of the mutual relations was hindered by some disputes over the final delimitation of the borders between Czechoslovakia and Romania.

[9] Zdeněk Konečný, Pavel Hradečný, *K problematice obchodních vztahů mezi Československem a Rumunskem v letech 1919-1931* [On the question of trade contacts between Czechoslovakia and Romania 1919-1931]. In: Slovanské historické studie VI, Praha 1966, p. 214 ff.

During the intervention against the Hungarian Republic of the Councils the Romanian Army occupied not only Hungary, but also some territory of Ruthenia, attached by the Peace Conference to Czechoslovakia. Romania referred in that connection to the existence of four villages in that region with Romanian population amounting to some 10 thousand people, and primarily to the necessity of securing the railway connection between Romania and Poland through the easternmost part of Ruthenia; the railway was used to send weapons to Poland.[10]

Although the Romanians were forced early in March 1920 to withdraw their troops from the occupied Hungarian territories, they were reluctant to do the same from Ruthenia. Only by the end of the month the Romanian Foreign Minister asked Prague whether Czechoslovakia insisted on the evacuation and, if so, whether a rectification of the borders could be discussed.

The Czechoslovak government, in spite of wishing to have as good relations as possible and being undoubtedly ready to discuss some concessions, decided to insist on the Peace Conference resolutions and required immediate and full evacuation of the entire Ruthenian territory.

However, the Romanian government, referring to technical problems, continued delaying the withdrawal, the main reason being primarily the transport of some 1500 wagons of salt from the rich salt mines of Acnoslatina and also the transport of railway facilities from Chust and Mukachevo.

It was not until another pressure by the Powers that the whole territory of Ruthenia was evacuated in mid-July 1920 and thus the only major dispute in the otherwise good rela-

[10] For details: M. Tejchman. *Počátek diplomatických vztahů československo-rumunských* [Beginning of the Czechoslovak-Romanian diplomatic relations], p. 273 ff.

tions between Czechoslovakia and Romania was settled. Soon after that a Czechoslovak-Romanian agreement on border rectification was signed. Czechoslovakia ceded to Romania eight villages in Marmařošska stolica with a total area of about 175 square kilometers in exchange for three Hungarian villages with a total area of 65 square kilometers.[11]

Early in August 1920, the Romanian Foreign Minister asked officially Prague for an agrément for Constantin Hiott, an ex-MP, who also became the first ordinary Romanian envoy to Prague. Hiott delivered his letters of credence to President T. G. Masaryk on 15 September. Simultaneously, a royal decree on the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Czechoslovak Republic and the Kingdom of Romania was issued. Thus, the process of establishing full diplomatic relations between the two countries was completed.

Late in November 1919, Ing. Čermák resigned from his post in Bucharest and Dr Veverka was called from Great Britain and charged with that position. Following the agrément of the Romanian government he took up the position of Czechoslovak envoy on 6 February 1920.

A priority was now the question of political and military agreement. Anyway, this question had already been discussed at the 1919 Peace Conference in Paris by the Czechoslovak delegates E. Beneš and Š. Osuský with the Romanian representatives I. I. C. Brătianu and T. Ionecu and with the representatives of South Slavs N. Pašić and A. Trumbić. In summer 1920, Beneš visited Bucharest in order to inform about the recently

[11] M. Tejchman, *Počátek diplomatických styků československo-rumunských* [The beginning of Czechoslovak-Romanian diplomatic relations], p. 278; Zdeněk Sládek, *Malá dohoda* (The Little Entente) 1919-1938. Karolinum, Praha 2000, p. 24: information taken from Documents on: *British Foreign Policy, First Series*, Vol. XXII, doc. No.169, pp. 205-207, mentioning 60 000 square kilometers.

signed treaty of alliance with the Kingdom of SCS (Yugoslavia) and also to invite Romania to join the treaty. During the talks with his Romanian counterpart T. Ionescu and Prime Minister A. Averescu the Romanian side expressed the wish to sign a similar agreement with Czechoslovakia, but oriented mainly against the Soviet Union. Beneš avoided this suggestion by referring to the fact that the treaty recently signed in Belgrade was exclusively aimed against Hungary and that Czechoslovakia was only ready to sign a treaty like this also with Romania. In spite of that, Beneš and Ionescu signed a provisional protocol saying that *"prior to signing an official treaty the two countries shall provide mutual assistance in case of unprovoked Hungarian attack against any of the three countries"*.[12]

Thus, the Little Entente idea was slowly coming true

In September 1920, the Romanian government agreed in general and gave up the unreal idea of the conservatives and liberals to include Poland into the planned community. The integration process accelerated also the first attempt of restoring the Habsburgs in Hungary in March 1921. Anyway, on 23 April a treaty of alliance was signed between Czechoslovakia and Romania; early in June, a similar one between Romania and South Slavs. And early in July a military agreement was signed in Prague between Czechoslovakia and Romania obliging the two states to provide mutual military assistance in case of unprovoked Hungarian aggression. A defensive agreement between Czechoslovakia and the Kingdom of SCS was signed already in August 1920 and one year later was replaced by a treaty of alliance. In June 1921, a treaty of alliance was signed

[12] Quoted from: M. Tejchman, *Nástin česko-rumunských vztahů* [Outline of Czech-Romanian relations], p. 413.

between Romania and Yugoslavia guaranteeing joint action in the case of breach of the Trianon and Neuilly agreements. At the same time, a military convention, a treaty of commerce and an agreement on borders were signed.

The treaties of alliance between Czechoslovakia and Romania and between Romania and Yugoslavia *"accomplished from the point of view of international law the formation of a bloc known as Little Entente"*.[13] Thus, the alliance of Czechoslovakia, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, and the Kingdom of Romania was completed. Still in September 1921, Romanian Foreign Minister Take Ionescu sent a message to Prague saying that he was a great friend of the Little Entente idea, would do everything to materialize it and would be happy to see in Bucharest the first meeting of politicians of this future group still before the end of the year.

The joint action taken by the governments in Prague and Belgrade and joined by Romania against the first restoration attempt of ex-Emperor Karl I. by the end of 1920 created favorable grounds for complementing the conventions of alliance by military agreements.

First, a Czechoslovak-Romanian agreement on defensive alliance was signed in the last decade of April obliging the two states to provide military aid "*in case that either party becomes a victim of unprovoked aggression by Hungary*". The military agreement was signed in Prague by General Constantin Cristescu early in July.

Early in June 1922, a military agreement between Romania and Yugoslavia was signed.

The joint actions taken by the Czechoslovak Republic, the Kingdom of SCS and Romania in connection with the Trianon Treaty negotiations and also in connection with the Polish cri-

[13] Z. Sládek, *Malá dohoda* [The Little Entente], p. 24.

sis, finalized by the treaties of alliance or agreements on allied co-operation between these three states, culminated in the creation of the Little Entente.[14]

Little Entente: Beginnings, development of the alliance, efforts aimed at maintaining it, and its end

While justifying in the parliament the creation of the new alliance early in September 1920, Edvard Beneš stressed the fact that the Little Entente countries had a total population of almost 45 million and *"had sufficient material and moral power to defend their interests and enough influence to contribute to true peace in Europe"*.[15]

The new grouping finally stabilized in accordance with the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav ideas and in the end of August 1922 the first Little Entente Conference was held in Prague.

The Little Entente was founded in contradiction to the ideas and interests of the French government circles as a response to the France-supported revision plan for the status quo established by the Peace Conference in favor of the Hungarian revisionism.

Contrary to the initial ideas of its founders the Little Entente eventually took the form of limited regional grouping with limited competence based on the joint feeling of potential threat. Any further attempts to increase its competence failed, mainly due to the inability of each of the three states to support any time and under any circumstances anything else but their own interests.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 21.

[15] Edvard Beneš, *Problémy nové Evropy a zahraniční politika Československa. Projevy a úvahy z let 1919-1924* [Problems of the New Europe and the foreign policy of Czechoslovakia. Speeches and reflections 1919-1924]. Melantrich, Praha 1924, p. 83.

This is also the reason why Yugoslavia did not succeed in mid-1920s in attempting to extend the Little Entente obligations to include an attack by Italy threatening the country at that time, and neither did Romania wishing the Little Entente from the very beginning to be a guarantee against any attempt by the Soviet Union to regain Bessarabia. And neither did Czechoslovakia succeed in trying, mainly in the 1930s, to extend the Little Entente obligations also to Germany. To put it briefly: Each of the three countries wanted the Little Entente to protect them against a neighboring Power, but without being ready to accept the risk of conflict with another Power that might threaten the interests of another allied country; hence, it was agreed that the Little Entente would remain a regional grouping aimed from the beginning on exclusively against the potential Hungarian threat (which, however, was not real for a long time).

Romanian Prime Minister Ion I. C. Brătianu visited Czechoslovakia early in September 1923 and his visit stressed the importance of the new alliance.

The new alliance within the Little Entente had soon to undergo a test in critical situation, vis-à-vis Locarno and the territorial revisionism of Hungary. The grouping started following a true active policy representing the efforts aimed at establishing a new international security system. In many questions the Little Entente countries were acting jointly, defending their interests against the Powers, but also against the neighboring Hungary (the optant question in the late 1920s).

As the initial alliance treaties were signed for a two-year period, they were repeatedly extended and finally, in 1929 at the Belgrade Conference of the Little Entente, a protocol of automatic extension of the existing treaties was signed. From September 1923 on, there was also a tripartite military convention defining the member state duties in the case of Hungarian aggression.

The Czechoslovak government started dealing with the economic relations to Romania from the beginning of 1919 and the first commercial treaty with Romania was signed in April 1921. However, the policy of self-sufficiency followed by the liberal Romanian government as well as the reluctance of the Czechoslovak side with respect to the importation of foodstuffs were responsible for the fact that during the 1920s Czechoslovakia was occupying the fifth place in Romania's imports while the exports to Romania accounted for less than 5 percent of the total Czechoslovak exports.

The Czechoslovak delegation to the Little Entente Conference held in May suggested to discuss the question of economic co-operation within the grouping. E. Beneš wrote about the talks in a circular telegram as follows: *"It is necessary to deal more in the future with the economic problems. The negotiations concerning our agreements with the SCS and Romania should already take this course."*[16]

It was only the fall of the liberal government in Romania and the rise of the National Peasant Party headed by Iuliu Maniu to a ruling body late in 1928 that opened the door to foreign capital and thus to the hope of improving the country's economic contacts with Czechoslovakia.

Early in September 1929, the Romanian government proposed negotiations about a new final commercial treaty and, at the same time, terminated the commercial treaty of 1919 at mid-November. In 1929, specific proposals were adopted for future – mainly economic – co-operation.[17] And in June 1930 a new commercial treaty was signed that remained in effect until 1939.

[16] AMZV, Praha, Fond Telegrams sent, 1927, No. 441 ff; Z. Sládek, *Malá dohoda* [The Little Entente], p. 105 ff.

[17] Z. Konečný, P. Hradečný, *K problematice obchodních vztahů mezi Československem a Rumunskem* [On the question of trade relations between Czechoslovakia and Romania], p. 233 ff; Z. Sládek, *Malá dohoda* [The Little Entente], p. 60 ff.

In the thirties, the structure and the volume of mutual trade corresponded to the character of both economies. Czechoslovakia's position in Romanian imports was insignificant, which was due to the strong political influence of the agrarians on the government in Prague. On the other hand, imports from Czechoslovakia accounted for an important portion in Romania's trade owing to industrial products and semiproducts needed in Romanian economy.

The good political relations made it also possible to stop the process of declining trade contacts due to the Great Depression and to the protectionist barriers created by the Czechoslovak government. In 1931, Czechoslovak imports from Romania dropped to mere 80 thousand tons, while the exports to that country amounted to almost 700 thousand tons and the balance of trade deficit rose to 1.4 billion lei.

The protocol signed in Prague on 22 January 1934 specified a number of measures in favor of the mutual exchange of goods and of the normalization of economic contacts. Owing to these efforts it was possible to increase the volume of mutual trade by 20 percent, so that in 1935 the balance of trade showed a deficit of only 90 million lei to the disadvantage of Romania. Contrary to that, in 1936 Romania achieved a credit balance of 79 million.

In the early 1930s the Little Entente states were facing attempts of the Powers to implement integration projects in Central Europe. The European Federal Union Plan submitted by French Minister Aristide Briand was officially appreciated both in Prague and Bucharest, but its potential implementation was "transferred" to the relevant committee of the League of Nations. Reports from March 1931 concerning a customs union planned between Germany and Austria made Beneš much worried, but not so much his Little Entente partners. Still, they authorized the Czechoslovak Foreign Minister to

strictly reject the plan in the League of Nations. The increasing trends of the Powers to decide on the Central European Region made eventually Beneš require concrete steps to strengthen the Little Entente cohesion.

At the Little Entente Conference held in Geneva on 18 and 19 December 1932 Edvard Beneš declared: *"We have to prepare to resist imperialist lust as the big states will feel temptation from time to time to treat us like colonies. We must particularly watch Germany, Italy, and sometimes also James R. MacDonald."*[18] It was already at that time that Czechoslovak diplomacy was preparing specific plans of reinforcing the Little Entente alliance in the political and economic fields. The conference approved the Little Entente Organization Pact proposed by Beneš, which was actually already being introduced and which exhibited much prudence, moderation and an impressive diplomatic form.

At the foreign ministers' meeting held in Geneva in mid-March 1933 the Czechoslovak plan of LE Organization Pact was submitted.[19] The Pact was stressing the intention of Little Entente states to rise to a higher level of international association and the Little Entente Standing Council was set up as its managing political body.[20] Particular questions, such as those concerning mutual co-operation of the three countries, were

[18] AMZV, Praha, Fond PZ Belgrade, 1932, p. 189. Quoted from: Z. Sládek, *Malá dohoda* (The Little Entente), p. 164.

[19] The proposal to strengthen the ties between the Little Entente countries was first made at the conference of foreign ministers held in Belgrade on 19 December 1932. Dušan Lukać, *Treći rajh i zemlje jugoistočne Evrope, I, 1933-1936.* Beograd 1982, pp. 66-67.

[20] Z. Sládek, *Malá dohoda* [The Little Entente], p.120 ff; Valerián Bystrický, Ladislav Deák, *Europa na prelome. Diplomatické a politické vzťahy v rokoch 1932-1933.* [Europe at a turning-point. Diplomatic and political relations in the years 1932-1933.]. Veda, Bratislava 1973, pp. 232-236.

to be coped with by the Standing Council Secretariat. Article VII of the Organization Pact included the idea of LE Economic Council as another common body of the Little Entente.

The new Little Entente organization structure played a role in preventing the Four Powers from implementing the Four-Power Pact.[21] Romanian Foreign Minister Nicolae Titulescu, acting on behalf of the three Little Entente countries, after failing to make France reject the Four-Power Pact, was assured that France in the case of potential co-operation with the Powers would not breach its obligations with respect to the Little Entente.

After the signing of the Organization Pact the Romanian envoy to Berlin Petrescu Comnen visited State Secretary Bernhard Wilhelm von Büllow in the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs to inform him that the Pact was not intended against Germany. Similar information was also delivered by the Yugoslav envoy.[22]

In its endeavor to cope with the growing power of Germany and Italy and the growing indifference of Great Britain in relation to Central and Southeastern Europe the French policy finally accepted the idea of what was known as the East Pact. The new French Foreign Minister Louis Barthou found mainly in Edvard Beneš an enthusiastic supporter of a potential Franco-Soviet rapprochement. At the next meeting of the Little Entente Standing Council in Belgrade in January 1934 he carried through the resolution saying that *"it is the right time to normalize our relations to the Soviets"*.[23]

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[21] For details: D. Lukać, *Treći rajh i zemlje jugoistočne Evrope, I, 1933-1936,* p. 68 ff.

[22] *Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik 1918-1945*. Aus dem Archiv des Deutschen Auswärtigen Amtes, Serie C: 1933-1937, *Göttingen 1971-1975,* I/1 No. 32, pp. 68-69.

[23] Z. Sládek, *Malá dohoda* (The Little Entente), p. 126. However, Titulescu's idea to settle the question of Bessarabia together with the mutual recognition was strongly opposed by King Carol and by Litvinov. The same

In order to strengthen the interconnection of the Little Entente states, regular meetings of the LE general staffs were held from the beginning of the 1930s. Until November 1934, there were seven such meetings, all of them planning actions to defeat Hungary at the very beginning of a potential conflict, and even a preventive war was considered. As of the 1920s, direct talks with the LE armies were taking place, both during the Little Entente conferences and on other occasions as well, such as through military delegations attending military maneuvers.[24]

The Great Depression brought about additional problems. Czechoslovakia did not succeed in persuading its LE partners to reject the Agrarian Block and to support André Tardieu's plan.

As of the early 1930s some disputes emerged in the economic co-operation between Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania. Czechoslovakia started reducing the imports from Romania, and vice versa, Romania was reducing its imports from Czechoslovakia. The first one was due to the pressure by agrarian circles, the latter one, to the pressure by local industry. When the first meeting of the LE Economic Council was held in Prague on 9 January 1934, which was to cope with the rapid decline of mutual trade between the LE states, almost nothing could be achieved. The following similar meetings did not succeed, either.

From 1934 on, arms accounted for a considerable part of Czechoslovak exports. Czechoslovak arms manufacturers

happened to Yugoslav Minister Jevtić with King Alexander. Eventually, on 9 June 1934, diplomatic relations were established between the USSR on the one hand and Czechoslovakia and Romania on the other. Yugoslavia refused to join them.

[24] For details: *Ibid.*, pp. 128-133. From older literature: Rudolf Kiszling, *Die militärische Vereibarungen der Kleinen Entente 1929-1937.* Oldenbourg, München 1959.

had been trying to penetrate in the Romanian market since the 1920s; however, all negotiations failed both due to the lack of interest on the Romanian side and, primarily, to the insolvency of Romania, which was interested in arms purchased on credit. On the other hand, Czechoslovak banks were reluctant to grant such credits due to their experience with Romania, which was not too good. Some Czechoslovak arms manufacturers even tried to expand to the Romanian territory in the 1920s, such as Zbrojovka of Brno attempting to manufacture machine guns in Cugir, or Škoda Works trying to construct an arms and ammunition factory in the same place or to participate in a company manufacturing French airplanes in Ploiešti, but all these efforts failed.

The situation changed after the Great Depression in the period of feverish arms race.

In 1934, Czechoslovak companies delivered to Romania arms worth 34 million Kč and, one year later, the volume rose to 196 million. In the following years, Romania ordered mostly guns, but also trailers and trucks, and the construction of an ammunition factory was discussed.

From 1934, this co-operation resulted from the regular negotiations between the military staffs of LE countries. Common defense plans were prepared at such meetings and ideas of common military industry and similar questions were formulated.

Military co-operation included also various credit agreements for Romania to fond the imported arms. In 1934-1935, the Czechoslovak arms manufacturing companies Škoda and Zbrojovka granted credits to Romania amounting in total to 816 million Kč to purchase machine guns, guns and ammunition. The credits were to be repaid in 1935-1942. Almost simultaneously, another credit of 200 million crowns was granted to Romania with the period of repayment in 1941-1948; the money was to be used to mechanize army units. Another

agreement was signed in January 1937 providing a credit of 557 million to purchase more weapons.[25]

According to the agreements signed between 1935 and 1938, Czechoslovak companies were expected to deliver to Romania weapons worth over 1.3 billion crowns. Until 1940, Romania repaid less than half that value. There were a number of corruption affairs connected to the arms deliveries, of which the most famous in the early 1930s was the case related to the then Škoda Works representative in Bucharest Bruno Seletzký. A part of the Czechoslovak arms credits was stolen by camarilla members, ministers, and General Staff officials.

A special agreement signed in July 1936 was that on funding the Vişaul-Vatra Dornei railway line through the easternmost territory of Romania that was intended to create railway connection between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union, if need be.[26] According to the agreement, Prague's Zemská banka provided an almost 100 million loan for its construction; however, the railway construction was never completed and most of the lent money ended in the bottomless pockets of ministerial and military officials[27].

[25] Drahomír Jančík, *Třetí říše a rozklad Malé dohody. Hospodářství a diplomacie v Podunají v letech 1936-1939* [The Third Reich and the disintegration of the Little Entente. Economy and diplomacy in the Danube Region 1936-1939]. Karolinum, Praha 1999, p. 140. Arms were supposed to be delivered by the companies Škoda, Tatra, ČKD, Zbrojovka Brno and Janeček arms factory. Zdeněk Sládek, *Štáby a zbrojovky Malé dohody* [Little Entente staffs and arms factories]. In: Slovanský přehled, Vol. 83, No. 3, 1997, p. 289.

[26] The protocol of Czechoslovakia's co-funding the railway to connect the USSR and Czechoslovakia after its completion at the turn of 1939 was signed on 14 July. AMZV, Praha, Cabinet, No. 165150/37.

[27] By the end of June 1938 Czechoslovakia provided additional funds for the dragging construction. M. Tejchman, *Československo a Rumunsko v roce 1938 a Malá dohoda* [Czechoslovakia and Romania in 1938 and the Little Entente], In: Slovanské štúdie, Vol. XII. Bratislava 1971, p. 97. For the first time mentioned in the paper by Václav Král, *Průchod Rudé armády Ru-*

In April 1936, the Czechoslovak government decided to foster the development of Little Entente arms industry. This was also a response to the declaration of the chief of Romanian General Staff, General Nicolae Samsonovici, of February 1933 that it was necessary to start manufacturing weapons of Czechoslovak type also in Romania and Yugoslavia. He was referring to a potential military conflict between the Little Entente countries and Germany or Italy supposing that the Czechoslovak Army after having retreated to Slovakia could not be supplied any more from the arms factories in Plzeň or Brno and would be dependent on the weapons made in Yugoslavia and Romania.[28]

Hence the above decision of the Czechoslovak government to support the construction of Little Entente arms industry. In agreement with the General Staff of the Czechoslovak Army the Czechoslovak government came to the conclusion that the construction of a second base of Czechoslovak arms industry was inevitable for the country's defense, irrespective of the high financial costs.

At the June conference of the chiefs of general staffs of LE armies a plan was prepared for the case of dragging war concerning the mutual deliveries of weapons and other military material. Construction of new factories was planned in the regions not immediately threatened by the potential enemy. The only territories meeting this condition were Slovakia, Romanian Siebenburgen, and Ancient Serbia.[29].

munskem na pomoc ČSR r. 1938 [The Red Army transit across Romania to help Czechoslovakia in 1938]. In: Slovanský přehled, Vol. 52, No. 6, 1966, pp. 330-338.

[28] AMZV, Praha, Fond PZ Bucharest, 1933, No. 51 of 28. 02. 1933.

[29] D. Jančík, *Třetí říše a rozklad Malé dohody* [The Third Reich and the disintegration of the Little Entente], p. 131 ff.

The factories coming into consideration in Romania were those of Copşa Mică in Cugir and Uzinele de Fier and Resitza Domeniums.

Zbrojovka Works, authorized by Škoda Company to represent Czechoslovak interests in Romania, signed a syndicate agreement on 16 April 1936 with both Romanian arms companies and two companies in Monaco. At the same time, a series of agreements were concluded that were confirming Škoda's monopoly of the guns and ammunition. The arms production program in Romania was divided between the two Romanian arms factories and Zbrojovka Works, and through the last one also Škoda Works was involved.[30]

In 1937, the imports of weapons and ammunition from Czechoslovakia accounted for 35.4 percent of the total Romanian imports of that type. Czechoslovakia was the main supplier.[31] In machine gun and rifle deliveries from Brno's Zbrojovka and in guns from Škoda Works in Plzeň the country's position was unbeaten. The portion of arms imported in 1937 from Germany was 22%, from Belgium 14%, and from Great Britain less than six percent.[32]

The non-realization of the idea of collective security had far-reaching consequences for the whole Central and Southeastern Europe. Actually, it was already Locarno that opened the door to future German expansion that could already be

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 134.

[31] Most Romanian orders went to Škoda Works in Plzeň, although its products were not cheap and although cheaper arms were available from the Swedish company Bofors, English Vickers, or Swiss Solothurn. Nevertheless, the Czechoslovak terms and conditions of credits were the most favorable. *Ibid.*, p. 143.

[32] *Ibid.* Still in 1933, the Czechoslovak share was 25%, the French 63% and the German less than five percent. Germany supplied Romania in the latter half of the 1930s with the material that the Czechoslovak companies could not deliver, such as submarines, airplanes or searchlights.

felt everywhere from the mid-1930s. The existing "protector" of the whole region between Germany and the Soviet Union, which was France, proved again to be not too reliable, and so the governments of some East European countries, frightened to death, preferred to seek inspiration in London's beginning appeasement policy while looking for ways towards a neutral position believed to be comfortable and safe, on good terms with everybody as much as possible.

During Titulescu's term of office Romania shared the principles of collective security, agreed with the Czechoslovak-French and Czechoslovak-Soviet Pact signed in 1935, and its diplomacy was preparing a similar step. In August 1936, however, Nicolae Titulescu was relieved of his office and King Carol himself started deciding on the country's foreign policy.

The subsequent change of the existing unilateral foreign political orientation reflected a crisis of the Romanian foreign policy based primarily on the existence of the Versailles System; the crisis of that system brought about necessarily also a crisis of the Romanian policy represented by Titulescu. The change was also due to some domestic political conversions.

In practice, the change meant a certain shift in the foreign political orientation of the country: the principle of collective security was slowly abandoned and the idea of pact with the Soviets was buried. To fill the gap thus created new courses of political orientation were sought, namely to Poland, and the idea of pact with Italy reappeared. Simultaneously, Bucharest rejected the proposed pact between the Little Entente and France.

Of course, the above change did not mean a total break with the country's allies, but rather a shift toward a policy of maneuvering between two sides. It appears that Romania saw a model in Poland tending not to bind itself politically to any bloc or grouping.

Victor Ion Antonescu, who succeeded to Titulescu in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was a good representative of the new foreign political orientation that was increasingly determined by King Carol.

The change in the foreign political orientation was also supported by the local rightists, from the fascists of different orientation, through the right young liberals to the conservatives, and also by some agrarians and industrialists who had been long eager to enter the insatiable and always needy German market.[33] They all exerted pressure on the Romanian foreign policy to make it turn to the opposite direction.

King Carol, who since his enthronement had systematically strived for royal dictatorship dreaming about what was achieved by Mussolini and Hitler, appreciated the pressure aimed at a change of policy; nevertheless, he had to take into account the strong and traditional pro-French and pro-Little-Entente feelings among a considerable part of Romanian society. Moreover, he needed the existing allies, as Germany and its allies required a revision of the peace agreements on which the existence of Great Romania was dependent.[34] When Carol visited London in summer 1937, he did not conceal his wish to create *"a new axis: Bucharest-London"*.[35]

Thus, a policy of maneuvering emerged, trying to be on good terms with everybody, but without binding itself anywhere.

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[33] For details: Zdeněk Sládek, Miroslav Tejchman, *Hospodářské pronikání nacistického Německa do zemí jihovýchodní Evropy v letech 1933-1940* [Economic penetration of Nazi Germany into the countries of Southeastern Europe in 1933-1940]. In: Slovanské historické studie, Vol. XI, 1976, pp. 175–207.

[34] Miroslav Tejchman, *Czechoslovakia, Romania and the Little Entente in 1938.* In: Czechoslovakia and Romania in the Versailles System. Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, Praha, 2006, p. 174.

[35] AMZV, Praha, Fond Dr. Krofta, Kabinet 1937, No. 3555 (Jan Masaryk's letter of 29. 07. 1937).

The contradictory foreign political course manifested itself primarily in relation to Czechoslovakia, Romania's closest ally.

The first to dissociate from the French system of alliance was Yugoslavia, mainly through the relation of the Stojadinović government to its Czechoslovak ally and to the Little Entente in general.

From his first presence at the Little Entente Conference in Bled late in August 1935 the Yugoslav Prime Minister did not conceal his aversion to the policy pursued by Beneš and Titulescu. He also immediately rejected the Czechoslovak proposal of 1936 to conclude an agreement on general mutual assistance (repeated by Delbos one year later) and thus extend the Little Entente obligations; on contrary, he signed in the first quarter of the next year a treaty of friendship with Bulgaria and then also with Italy (he had his policy approved in London in November 1937). And in January 1938, Stojadinović personally assured Hitler that Yugoslavia would not accept any obligations aimed against Germany.

Romania, too, started abandoning the LE-based policy from the mid-1930s.

Already at the Bratislava conference held in 1936 it supported the neutralist policy pursued by Yugoslav Prime Minister Stojadinović, and one year later the Romanian government let the right elements unleash a campaign against the Czechoslovak envoy Jan Šeba in response to his book "Československo a Malá dohoda v politice světové" [Czechoslovakia and the Little Entente in global policy].[36]

At the Little Entente summit meeting in Bucharest from 6 to 8 June 1937, convened upon initiative of the Romanian King, Carol assured Beneš of his loyalty to the Little Entente

[36] Jindřich Dejmek, *Šebova aféra 1937* [The Šeba affair of 1937]. In: Slovanský přehled, Vol. 73, No. 3-4, 1993, pp. 253-265.

principles and of the wish to further intensify mutual relations. Based on this *"Beneš made soon an attempt to reinforce the alliance by deepening its ties to France (Czechoslovak diplomacy started for the first time considering a common contractual instrument between the Little Entente and the Third Republic)"*.[37] However, when at the next regular LE Conference in Bratislava in mid-September the Czechoslovak delegation submitted a plan of universal pact not only against Hungary, which had been prepared at the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs and preliminarily consulted with Paris, it was approved as a basis of further negotiations only.

Romania's focus was increasingly shifting toward England, which King Carol would like to be his ally No 1. *"Romania is considered a satellite of France, and this must come to an end. We shall try to create a new axis: Bucharest-London,"* he declared in July 1937 to the Czechoslovak envoy Jan Masaryk during his visit to London.[38] Perhaps he already knew that everything would finally depend on England. He certainly did not conceal his admiration for Chamberlain's "realism". Nevertheless, his visit to the metropolis on the Thames was far from being a success. Anyway, England was already more or less determined to sacrifice Central and Southeastern Europe to Hitler and thus to preserve peace for the rest of the world and primarily for itself. With the new course Romania's foreign policy increasingly focused on Poland, which was getting into isolation and was seeking an ally that could help Poland return from the periphery of European politics.

[37] Jindřich Dejmek, Edvard Beneš. *Politická biografie českého demo-krata. Část druhá. Prezident republiky a vůdce národního odboje (1935-1948)* [Political biography of a Czech democrat. Part II. President of the Republic and leader of the national resistance movement (1935-1948)]. Karolinum, Praha 2008, p. 40.

[38] AMZV, Praha, Fond Dr Kamil Krofta, Cabinet 1937, No. 3355 (Jan Masaryk's letter of 29. 07. 1937).

Consequently, Minister Józef Beck was able during his visit to Bucharest in April 1937 to openly suggest to King Carol that Romania join the policy of non-participation in blocs pointing out to the decision of the Powers to leave the eastern part of Europe to Germany. Simultaneously, he presented a plan of more rapprochement between Poland, Romania and Yugoslavia.[39]

The Polish initiative made Prague worried and Czechoslovakia, aware of the new wind blowing from Bucharest after the fall of Titulescu, complained in Paris about the increasing quantity of Romania's obligations toward Poland[40] while the Romanian government was absolutely reluctant to speak about any extension of its obligations toward Czechoslovakia.[41]

Paris, which was not worried about the rapprochement of Romania and Poland and tried to downplay the alarm of Prague, acted energetically to stop the negotiations about the Italian offer to conclude an agreement similar to the one signed by Rome with Yugoslavia. Romanian Foreign Minister Victor I. Antonescu had finally to promise that his government would not take any steps without preliminary consultation with France. However, neither Paris nor Prague did then anything else and contented themselves with the formal, hence worthless assurances of the Romanian side that there was no reason to be worried.

However, after the Anschluss of Austria there was immediate danger to Czechoslovakia. And Prague endeavored, with

[39] Polski institut spraw międzynarodowych, Warszava, archiv, Minutes of Carol-Beck talks on 22-25 April 1937.

[40] After Beck, Bucharest was visited by Polish President Mościcki, Chief of General Staff Stachiewcz, General Inspector of Polish Army Rydz-Śmigły, and more officials were preparing for the trip. A number of steps were being prepared that were not in compliance with Romania's commitments.

[41] AMZV, Praha, Fond Messages sent in 1937, No. 435, to Paris on 03. 07.

hesitant support of France, to reinforce the ties to its allies. However, Czechoslovakia's interest could not be essential as the most important voice was that of the Powers and Czechoslovakia could not but play a secondary role in the diplomatic struggle for Romania.

In December 1937, Octavian Goga's pro-fascist government came to power in Romania. The new Foreign Minister Istrate Micescu informed Prague in January 1938 that *"Carol instructed Goga and Micescu right after the constitution of his government to stress the firm pursuit of the existing line of alliance, particularly with France and the Little Entente"*.[42]

Nevertheless, by the end of March 1938 Prime Minister George Tatarescu told the French envoy Adrien Thierry: *"In the case of conflict between Czechoslovakia and Germany our convention with Poland and with the Balkan Treaty states obliges us to be neutral"*.[43] At the same time, both Romania and Yugoslavia rejected the Czechoslovak proposal to extend the Little Entente obligations to the case of attack by Germany. At the LE Conference held in Sinai in May Romania supported Stojadinović's opinion that the question of Sudetenland and potential conflict with Germany is an internal Czechoslovak matter.[44] At the same time, Romanian Foreign Minister Petrescu Comnen stated that they had rejected separate talks suggested by the Hungarians knowing the "abandoning Czechoslovakia would mean also a destruction of Romania and Yugoslavia".[45] King Carol said the same to Beneš adding that Romania would intervene in case of unprovoked attack.

[42] J. Dejmek, *Edvard Beneš. Politická biografie* [Edvard Beneš. Political biography], p. 92

[43] Nicolae Petrescu-Comnen, *Preludi del grande dramma*. Edizioni Leonardo, Roma 1947, p. 37.

[44] Documents on German Foreign Policy, Serie D, Vol. I, London-New York 1953, doc. No. 199 (Fabricius of Bucharest, 06. 05. 1938).

[45] AMZV, Praha, Fond Cabinet, No. 78521/38.

From spring 1938, Polish policy paid increased attention to Yugoslavia and Romania expecting a quick end of Czechoslovakia and hoping that Poland might acquire the status of leader of Central and Southeast European countries. Therefore, Warsaw made every effort to paralyze the Czechoslovak-Romanian alliance and to persuade the ruling circles of Romania that in the new situation it was necessary to realistically analyze the situation and change the orientation of Romanian policy. Warsaw also tried to convince Bucharest that under the given circumstances there was no other way than to seek a bilateral agreement with Hungary. Beck's representative Jan Szembek made an attempt in summer to make Carol and Petrescu Comnen sign an agreement with Hungary. He failed and had to state that Romania was not ready to abandon Czechoslovakia.[46]

Unlike Yugoslavia, Romania was taking the threat to Czechoslovakia seriously. Czechoslovakia constituted an important pillar of Romania's security against the danger of Hungarian revisionism, played an important role in equipping and arming the Romanian Army and had common borders with Romania.

The Anschluss of Austria was a shock to Bucharest that strengthened the policy of maneuvering and the concept of neutrality. Seeing that the West was yielding to Germany and losing any interest in defending Czechoslovakia, Romania followed the Yugoslav model and started declaring that it had no obligation to support Czechoslovakia in case of German-Czechoslovak conflict. The best viable policy of Romania appeared to be a synchronization of actions with those of the British government which, as King Carol said, was not only a key to solve the crisis, but also a guideline for Romania. Romanian calculations leaned on the opinion that if the West failed

[46] Ladislav Deák. *Zápas o strednú Európu 1933-1938*: Politicko-diplomatické vzťahy [Struggle for Central Europe 1933-1938: Political-diplomatic relations]. Veda, Bratislava 1986, pp. 150-151.

to make Czechoslovakia settle the problem of German minority in a "peaceful way" Bucharest would get rid of its major headache: the question of corridor for the Red Army.

Should the developments lead to a conflict, the official Romanian circles believed that there would be a danger of Bolshevization of Europe and Romania could lose the occupied Bessarabia. It is therefore quite understandable that after the May mobilization of Czechoslovak Army there was much confusion in Bucharest.

The country's approach to the question of potential transfer of the Red Army across Romanian territory to support the invaded Czechoslovakia was ambiguous: the transfer was undesirable, but on the other hand it was impossible to openly say "no". In autumn 1937 King Carol, who had been opposing the idea from the very beginning, changed his attitude for the time being and in an interview with General Maurice Gustave Gamelin admitted the potential transfer.[47] Romania was ready to allow the transfer in the case of general military conflict, in which case Romania would undoubtedly stand by Czechoslovakia and its allies.[48] Nevertheless, Bucharest was always reluctant to make a clear statement on that matter.

Actually, this was understandable. *"What must our policy be like? No sentimentalism, but the interest of our country. We can neither join the Russians, nor support the Germans...*

[47] Maurice Gustave Gamelin, *Le prologue du drame (1930-août 1939).* Vol. II. Poln, Paris 1946, p. 279.

Almost simultaneously, however, he informed Beck that "Romania will never allow any transfer of Soviet troops across its territory". AMZV, Praha, Fond Messages received in 1937, Warsaw 10. 7. 1937.

[48] More precisely as Minister Comnen put it in May 1938: "A local conflict is today impossible, and in a general conflict it must be clear to everybody where Romania will stand. If the question of transfer, which is today so delicate, is raised then, the answer may be in a different sense." AMZV, Praha, Fond Messages received in 1938, No. 503, Bucharest 26. 06. 1938.

So what to do? France is weak and yields. What remains is England. Germany has always succeeded in bluffing, has not faced a resolute resistance. Otherwise, they would not have dared. We are in a difficult situation…"[49] This is how King Carol characterized the situation of his country. And that is why the Romanian answer to the transfer question was *"yes, but under certain circumstances only, in the case of a total conflict in which Romania will join many other countries and stand by Czechoslovakia."*

On 26 May Minister Petrescu Comnen told the Czechoslovak envoy that "today, any local military conflict is out of the question, and in the case of a general conflict it must be clear to everybody where Romania will stand". Simultaneously, King Carol informed Prague that he would decide on the transfer question as soon as the situation required it.[50]

This hot question for Romania was not raised for the first time. In the Titulescu era it was frequently discussed at many meetings and was practically brought to an end during the Titulescu-Litvinov talks in Montreux in summer 1936 and, based on this, the above mentioned protocol of Czechoslovakia´s co-funding the Vişaul-Vatra Dornei railway connecting Czechoslovakia with the Soviet Union could be signed.

Romanian policy in the period of Czechoslovak crisis can be described as inconsistent, extremely inconsequent and contradictory. The same can be said about Romania's position during the crucial days in the latter half of September.

In the September crisis Romania showed a much more positive attitude to Czechoslovakia than the Stojadinović gov-

[49] Memoriile A. Călinescu, audience with King Carol 24.05.1938. Quoted from: Miroslav Tejchman, *Malá dohoda a Mnichov* [The Little Entente and Munich]. In: Mnichov 1938, 1. díl, Praha 1988, p. 120.

[50] L. Deák, *Zápas o strednú Európu* [Struggle for Central Europe], pp. 237-238.

ernment of Yugoslavia. Romanian diplomacy took action to preserve the integrity of Czechoslovakia, primarily in reaction to Hungary's revision requirements, as neither a great expansion of the not too friendly neighbor nor an interruption of the Czechoslovak arms deliveries or, last but not last, a much weakened ally in the Little Entente pact was in Romania's interest. Still on 16 September, Minister Petrescu Comnen proposed to Poland and to the Balkan Pact member countries an antirevisionist intervention in Paris and London in the form of common declaration stating that they would not join any grouping of revisionist nature and that, on the contrary, they would oppose any such attempt.[51] Three days later Petrescu Comnen addressed Yugoslavia, its LE ally.[52] At the same time, the Bucharest government assured the Czechoslovak chargé d´affaires that Romania would stick to its alliance obligations; however, these were traditionally limited to a potential aggression by Hungary.[53]

Nevertheless, on 23 September the Romanians informed Rome that they had nothing against Hungary's annexing the southern and eastern parts of Slovakia, but they resolutely rejected an annexation of the whole Slovakia.[54] One week later, Carol informed Polish President Mościcki that he considered

[51] Eliza Campus, *Mica Înțelegere.* Editura Științifică, București 1968, p. 315.

[52] On 20 September, Comnen met with the Yugoslav delegate Andrić in Geneva to specify his proposals. However, Stojadinović did not hasten to reply, although Comnen had urged it on 21. N. P. Comnen, *Preludi del grande dramma*, p. 102.

[53] *Československá zahraniční politika v roce 1938. Dokumenty československé zahraniční politiky* [Czechoslovak foreign policy in 1938. Documents of Czechoslovak foreign policy]. Eds. Jindřich Dejmek in cooperation with Jan Němeček, Helena Nováčková and Ivan Šťovíček, Vol. A/20/2, Praha 2001, doc. No. 594, p. 281.

[54] *Ciano´s Diplomatic Papers.* Odhams Press, London 1948, p. 156.

the Polish claims to Czechoslovak territories *"fair and justified"* and that he would do everything *"to make the Czechs accept them"*.[55]

The Little Entente was facing the last days of its existence. After Yugoslavia, which had pulled out earlier, it was now Romania that was apparently retiring. In October 1938, however, Bucharest rejected the Polish proposals to participate in the plan of fixing a common Polish-Hungarian border by attaching Ruthenia to Hungary. In exchange for it, Warsaw offered to Romania the eastern part of Ruthenia with Romanian population. However, when Józef Beck arrived to Galace shortly after 17 October to persuade Carol and Petrescu Comnen that it would be useful to attach Slovakia and Ruthenia to Hungary, he met with resistance of the Romanians in spite of offering as compensation a part of the Ruthenian territory with Romanian minority.[56]

This all happened while Czechoslovakia was abandoned by its allies. At a meeting of the narrow Council of Ministers on 26 September the new Romanian Prime Minister, Miron Cristea, declared: *"Let us preserve our neutrality as long as we*

[55] Archiwum akt nowych, Ministerstvo spraw zagranicznych, Warszava, P III 1938, W.106, t. 7-c.d. Bucharest 01. 10. 1938 (the message mentioned above stresses also the fact the "the King agrees with the Polish position and with its action against the region of Těšín").

[56] There was a Romanian population of about ten thousand people in three villages. When a delegation of these Ruthenian Romanians visited Minister Comnen on 1 November 1938 to hand over a memorandum expressing their wish to stay within the Czechoslovak Republic, and only if this proves impossible to be attached to Romania, he assured them of the Government's and King's support, and the Romanian attitude to an annexation of that territory then really changed, although it was clear that it would hardly stay within a united Czechoslovak Republic. J. Beck, *Dernier Rapport*: *Politique polonnaise, 1926–1939*. La Baçonniere, Neuchâtel *1951,* p. 172; Jan Szembek, Journal 1933-1939, Plon, Paris 1952, p. 356; N. Petrescu-Comnen, *Preludi del grande dramma,* p. 283.

can, and the good relations to Germany as well. We cannot play with the Czechs any longer." And King Carol added: *"This is over now. But what shall we say when they ask us? We must prepare an answer."*[57] And three or four days later the Minister of the Court Urdăreanu assured the Hungarian envoy Bárdossy that the Little Entente did not exist any longer[58]. And King Carol said the same in an interview with the Yugoslav Prince Regent Paul.[59]

On 21 November, Milan Stojadinović stated at a meeting with the German envoy V. von Heeren that the Little Entente did not exist.[60]

Hence, the question of Romanian support of Czechoslovakia in the difficult days of Munich Crisis is a very complex one. The truth is that some – mostly diplomatic – actions in support of Czechoslovakia were taken, although the reasons were not always unselfish. The fact that these actions failed to exhibit more specific and mainly more efficient forms cannot be attributed to the then official Romania only. Although some Romanian circles, and primarily King Carol and his men can certainly be partly blamed, primarily for their ambiguous and unfair policy, we must resolutely reject any opinion that Romania deliberately helped destroy Czechoslovakia, as well as another extreme view believing that "Romania was the only

[57] According to A. Călinescu's notes, quoted from M. Tejchman, Československo a Rumunsko v roce 1938 [Çzechoslovakia and Romania in 1938], Note 75, pp. 104-105.

[58] *Diplomáciai iratok Magyarország külpolitikájához 1936–1945. II. A müncheni egyezmény létrejötte és Magyarország külpolitikája 1936-1938.* Eds. Magda Ádám, László Zsigmond. Budapest 1965, doc. No. 436 (Bárdossy from Bucharest, 01. 10. 1938).

[59] N. Petrescu-Comnen, *Preludi del grande dramma,* p. 359.

[60] Arhiv Socialističke federativne republike Jugoslavije, Beograd, Fond A I, M S, 1938, Stojadinović's record of his talk with the German envoy of 22. 11. 1938.

country that dared declare itself in favor of its ally".[61] The truth is probably somewhere in-between; the Romanian politicians were well aware of the complexity of the situation and they tried to act accordingly, sometimes perhaps in a too complicated way, taking primarily account of their country's interests.

Thus, those who should be held primarily responsible for what happened are the governments of the great western democracies, England and France, co-authors of the Munich Agreement. And while the two Powers in their effort to preserve peace at any cost were ready to reach an agreement with Hitler at the expense of Czechoslovakia, the maneuvering of a small country like Romania is quite understandable. Moreover, there is enough indirect evidence that primarily the French government was misusing the negative statements of Romania. It is quite interesting to see how many times Bonnet readily referred to such Romanian statements using them literally as a shield to hide behind.

While the attitude of Romania's official representation can be viewed as cautious, not always unambiguous and not quite fair to Czechoslovakia, the attitude of the Romanian public was totally different.

People of different opinion and political orientation, from the leftists through social democrats to agrarians and liberals, joined the common platform in support of Czechoslovakia.

The most active supporters of Czechoslovakia were the Romanian caranists (agrarians), who resolutely advocated the pro-western orientation of Romania and systematically criticized the government for its ambiguous policy. Party Chairman I. Mihalache pointed to its wrongness: *"Our state has seldom faced a situation like today's. In foreign policy we do not know*

[61] N. Petrescu-Comnen, *Anarchie, dictature ou organisation internationale,* Genève 1946, p. 127.

who is and who has already ceased to be our ally. We live inside the country on a volcano while in foreign policy it is indecisiveness and disorientation that prevail." And in the difficult and complex situation of the last September days of 1938 another important leader of the Party, I. Maniu, declared: *"We must be prepared for any sacrifice in order to defend our country and maintain the ties and agreements signed with our friends. We want to live freely in a free state, and we want to preserve our dignity in the world as a nation that keeps its word, which is what we can only achieve by honoring our international obligations that we have accepted."*[62]

The Little Entente was an unambiguously oriented group of three successor states. It did not provide any guarantee but that against a potential Hungarian attack against any of the three countries. However, in the complex international situation of 1938 that had developed particularly in connection with Czechoslovakia it failed to provide even that limited guarantee: it proved inefficient for Czechoslovakia and became a burden for Yugoslavia and Romania.

With the first serious threat and under the unstable international conditions all the weak points of the Little Entente alliance and the heterogeneity of interests of its members came to the fore, so that it was finally the masses of common people both in Romania and in Yugoslavia that stuck to the long-professed idea of Little Entente solidarity.

[62] Lidové noviny, 27. 09. 1938.

The Munich Crisis in the Reports of the Romanian Military Attachés Abroad

Gheorghe Nicolescu
Alexandru Oşca

The Munich Conference of September 29, 1938 – which earmarked the outbreak of the termination of the Czechoslovak state – was of particular interest for the Romanian decision bodies. Suffice it to mention that a strong, well protected Czechoslovakia, sheltered from the risk of aggression, represented a guarantee for the strategic balance in Central Europe and for keeping up the *status-quo* in this region. The Czechoslovak state was part of the Little Entente (Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Romania), but Czechoslovakia mattered in a wider political equation in the second interwar decade, by the treaties that binding her to France and the Soviet Union.

For Romania, the Czechoslovak state was more than merely a random ally. The Czechoslovak industry had the capacity to meet the increasing needs of the Romanian economy and, moreover, it had had everything available for most of the ambitious modernizations plan of her military potential. The diplomacies of the two countries were supporting each other and fitted into European projects, in or outside the League of Nations. The leaders and military planners in both countries' armies were meeting frequently – either separately or together with their Yugoslav correspondents – to discuss, in perfect understanding and cooperation spirit, strategic projects and plans for joint operations in case of war.[1]

[1] Mihai Retegan, În balanța forțelor, *[In the balance of forces],* Signs, Bucharest, 1997, pp. 73-136.

This is why the Romanian decision makers focused their attention mainly on the „Sudeten crisis", while the military attachés – just the same as other diplomats – tried hard to figure out, to foresee the progress of the crisis, the position of the European states with regard to it and to inform promptly Bucharest out of the capitals where they were accredited. The conclusions of the great many reports, accounts, discussion minutes and press reviews usually focussed on the military aspects, but quite often the assessments were based also on analyses of the general political or economic situation in Europe.

The international political life in the interwar period witnessed profound novelties and changes, which were coming in an amazing dynamic succession. The peace solutions and the new political and state structure in Europe at the end of the war were challenged from the very beginning by the defeated states and they nourished revisionist and militaristic trends and attitudes. The two above mentioned concepts and principles, promoted by the Americans – the concept of collective security and the principle of nationalities – were not possible to implement; the US withdrew from the European affairs, and the League of Nations – an organization designed to guarantee the observance of peace treaties – displayed a lack of political will, determination and instruments for the enforcement of the organization's decisions. In the absence of an efficient warrantor, each state interested in maintaining the territorial status-quo looked for solutions, in accordance with the Covenant of the League, by signing bilateral or multilateral conventions and treaties, intended to deter the attempts of forceful return to the pre-war status.

Such constructions had mainly a political character, but they involved also an actual military component. Despite all efforts and the optimism around them, the political-military alliances – among them the Little Entente, to which both Ro-

mania and Czechoslovakia were parts – proved in the end to lack the consistency and force capable to fight off the attack on the independence and territorial integrity of one of the partners. Up to the mid-1930s, the goals of the cooperation between the military of the countries of the Little Entente and of other allied countries were quite ambitious. Moreover, in the time nearing the Sudeten crisis and the disintegration of Czechoslovakia there took place talks about the translocation alternative of the Czechoslovak war industry to Transylvania or Yugoslavia. On his return from his visit to Romania at the end of 1936, the French general Mittelhauser prepared an exhaustive report on the capabilities of Romania and the Little Entente, generally.

General Mittelhauser (63) was one of the youngest members of the Supreme Defence Council and he dealt mainly with the issues related to the Little Entente. His intention was to gather information on the status of artillery material and ammunition and of the aeronautical technique, but the French support in this field remained limited only to declarations. Mittelhauser informed at a later date with regard to the storage of French military equipment in Romania that „Mr. Pierre Cot is clearly against the establishment of such a storage and that, in turn, he is in favour of the establishment of aviation bases meant to take over the role of the relevant Czechoslovak facilities, after their occupation by the Germans", reported from Paris the Romanian military attaché, colonel Gh. Potopeanu[2]. General Samsonovici had in mind to address with the French representatives the issues relating to the strengthening of the cooperation with the French army, and also with the Czech and Yugoslav military, translated into a quick and more important relocation of the Czech industry in Romania, on the gen-

[2] Romanian Military Archives (A.M.R.), Fond The Higher General Staff, Section 3 Operations, file 1024, f. 66.

eral behalf of the Little Entente and of Romania, while France was supposed to provide the equipment that was not available either in Czechoslovakia or Romania; expediting the delivery of anti-tank armament specified in the commercial agreement of February 1936; the endowment with ammunition and war equipment; cooperation between the General Staff teams of the Little Entente countries and the French General Staff [3].

At the conference organized by the Romanian Great General Staff on the 4th of December 1936 with general Mittelhauser, one of the issues at hand was the requirement that – jointly and for a higher degree of security – the Armies of the Little Entente should have available the necessary war industry facilities in Transylvania and, consequently, the need of the backing of the better equipped allies for the purpose of implementing such industry.

But the public commitments of the great democratic powers for warranting the status-quo in Central and South-East Europe were not fulfilled. On the contrary!

Under these circumstances, facing the revisionism on the rise after January 1933, the young threatened states had no other choice than to rely on their own forces.

Since these capacities were confined and scarce, they sought to optimize them through clever and flexible policies, intent on circumstances. To this effect, it was necessary to gather accurate, complete and relevant intelligence on the capability, the plans and directives of the decision taking bodies of the other allied countries or of potential attacker states. Such intelligence could be obtained only through a very well trained specialized staff with significant diplomatic experience.

This explains the attention shown by the Romanian decision makers to the implementation of a well sized network of top quality military diplomats, accredited in the main Europe-

[3] *Ibidem,* f. 73.

an capitals of interest for Bucharest. Their mission was clearly determined by the Regulations for Romanian military, aviation and navy attachés, as well as by the methods applied by the military attachés for obtaining relevant information items.

The „Sudeten Crisis" was not confined to its outcome of the 29th of September 1938, so that the Romanian military attachés described it in every of its successive stages. So that in our present report we make reference to their reports and briefs starting with the occupation of Austria by the Great Reich in March 1938 because, invariably – despite any reassurance – the Romanian military diplomats were convinced that Germany's next step was going to be the disintegration of Czechoslovakia.

However, the „Sudeten crisis" was only seemingly an issue concerning solely the bilateral German-Czechoslovak relations. Its content, route, outcome and, especially, its consequences, caused this to be a crisis of international relations generally and of the European ones in particular; one way or another, every European country, no matter if small or large, revisionist or anti-revisionist, closer or farther from the hot spot of the conflict, each of them in accordance with their respective responsibilities and interests, got related or involved in this crisis. That's why we examined and analysed the reports referring to the conflict originating from the Romanian military attachés both in Prague or in Berlin, and also in Budapest, Paris, London, Belgrade, Sofia, Ankara.

Of course, it will be impossible for us to present all these important documents in one report only. Prior to rendering and explaining the contents of the selected papers we would like to point your attention to some of their general characteristics.

1. In the first place, we have to point out the quality of the reports, the diversity of the sources used by the military attachés in the preparation of the documents. They most fre-

quently used open, official sources, but also some unnamed officers of the General Staffs of the host-countries, acquaintances based on mutual trust, after many years of knowing each other and working together;

2. Secondly, one is surprised by the style, the accurate and refined vocabulary, far from the barracks or strictly technical language, used for editing the report texts. This allows us to understand that the respective military diplomats were well aware that their reports landed, often in their original, not processed form, straight on the desks of the top ranking people in charge at the helm of the state, many of them not in the least familiar with the military lingo;

3. Thirdly, we have to mind the promptness, fastness and intuition/capacity of the military diplomats to foreknow the evolution, the outcome and the consequences of the Sudeten crisis.

The reports of the Romanian attachés of the main European capitals had foreseen quite accurately the reason of the German policy. The documents stressed – with arguments and real facts – the intention of the German government to push on towards the East so as to expand their „Lebensraum" through political actions and pressure via diplomatic channels, all that cautiously, by little steps, meanwhile uttering false reassurance and guarantee speeches for the targeted neighbours and for the democratic states involved in maintaining the strategic balance. Prior to the Sudeten crisis, the leaders in Berlin were striving to appease chiefly the Czechoslovaks and the government officials in London. An urgent cable sent by the Romanian military attaché in Berlin (on March 12, 1938)[4] contains the following details: „Göring assured the Czechoslovak minister plenipotentiary that the present action is not target-

[4] A.M.R., Fond The Higher General Staff, Section 2, cable no. 115 of 12th March 1938, (inventory attachment) file no. 813, f. 157.

ing Czechoslovakia".[5] The same cable lets us know that during the Austrian crisis Ribbentrop, who was still in London, was trying to persuade the British of the same thing.[6]

Well informed and up-to-date in connection with the situation in France, the Berlin officials were not concerned about France's potential reaction as to their aggressive intentions to the East, because of the internal disputes and the instability of the Paris government. The French General Staff was not making any estimate of the consequences of the Anschluß for the security of allied Czechoslovakia. On the 14th of March 1938, a cable of the Romanian military attaché informed about the bewilderment and confusion at the top of the French army after the annexation of Austria by the German Reich: "Because of the government crisis, the measures had some difficulties. The new government considers the external political situation as serious enough. There are no more expectations for the support from Italy. Political measures: Joint protest with England in Berlin against the occupation of Austria. They are trying to persuade England to counter a potential invading of Czechoslovakia or of other states".[7]

In an attempt to summarize the opinions on the events in Central Europe, gathered from different political and military circles, the Romanian military attaché transmitted one day later (March 15) to Bucharest the position of the French officials, who seemed content with rather conventional, perfunctory responses to the Germans' obvious violation of the Paris Treaty: „It seems that Germany will continue her programme of conquests. Therefore, an invasion into Czechoslovakia can not be ruled out for the next future, thus making avail of the currently

[5] *Ibidem.*

[6] *Ibidem.*

[7] A.M.R., Fond The Higher General Staff, Section 2 (inventory attachment) file no. 813, Cable no. 1521 of 14th March 1938, f. 141.

convenient circumstances and of Italy's present agreement...". He was fulfilling his duty to transmit also the seemingly adamant and manifest position of the French leaders towards a possible escalation of Berlin's claims for Czechoslovak territories: "If Germany attacked Czechoslovakia, the matter would take on a different appearance, because of the French-Czechoslovak treaty, whose implementation would be decided solely by the government".[8] The way he phrased his text suggests that the Romanian military attaché had noticed the lack of resoluteness of the leaders in Paris in the fulfilment of their commitments ensuing from the bilateral French-Czechoslovak Treaty.

Under these circumstances, the officials in Prague and their allies in the region were looking full of hope towards London, where the political establishment was stronger. From the viewpoint of the anti-revisionist countries in the centre and the East of Europe, Great Britain was a benchmark of solid democracy and defence of peace, although rather often it accepted compromises in order to avoid war. Unfortunately for Czechoslovakia, at the culmination of the Austrian crisis the attitude and position of the British government were causing concern in the prospect of a potential expansion of the tensions into the Czechoslovak space. Romanian military diplomats in London were monitoring carefully every move of the officials in connection with this aspect and transmitting to Bucharest their impressions based on certain findings. They noticed that the London leadership was showing indifference or regarded somewhat detached the happenings East of Germany, considering that, as long as the German revanchism played out in the East, British interests were not affected. The assistant to the Romanian military attaché in London – captain Gheorghe

[8] *Ibidem*, f. 142, Cable no. 418, 15 March 1938.

Iliescu, noted in connection with the position of the British officials with respect to the annexation of Austria by Germany, event which preceded the Sudeten crisis: „... Although this fact caused here much bewilderment, although there were (on the 13th of March) very impressive demonstrations (about 100 000 people) against Germany and Mr. Chamberlain, despite all that the leading circles kept their perfect cool",[9] considering that England has no special commitments towards Austria, except in the terms of the duties falling on all member states of the League of Nations". Moreover, the report went on saying that the authorized circles were trying to justify the German action, to explain it, arguing that the invasion of Austria could have been deemed accepted, since England meant that this was Germany's own internal subject matter and even that „Austria had wanted it, as amply proven both by the fact that the German troops did not encounter the least basic opposition, and by the enthusiastic reception shown to the troops and the Führer of Germany".[10] The engagements under the Paris peace treaties and the Covenant of the League of Nations were not even mentioned. The only positive aspect referred indeed to the decision to react in future to the strategy of the „fait accompli" practiced by the Germans, who did not accept to have previous talks regarding such situations. The British just sent a warning that in future a similar practice would make Great Britain to face the need „to take on a dynamic attitude with respect to the independence of Czechoslovakia".[11] The analysis of the Romanian diplomat stressed upon the fact that the British officials did not reject the actions and views of the Germans as such, but only the fact that they were imposed by force, not by dialogue or compromise.

[9] *Ibidem*, file no. 813, Cable no. 609 of 14th March 1938, f. 99/2-99/4.
[10] *Ibidem.*
[11] *Ibidem.*

For that matter, the Germans hurried to extend assurances to the very Czechoslovak government that the Anschluß was restricted only to Austria and that Prague was not running any risk.

In a cable dated March 13, 1938, the Romanian military attaché in Prague referred to sources in the Czechoslovak Great General Staff, which stated that no special measures had been taken besides alerting the Border Guard troops, since the government had received reassurance from Berlin on non-aggression and moderation towards Czechoslovakia. For credibility purposes it was announced that the German frontier troops had been order not to approach nearer than 15 km from the Czechoslovak border.[12]

However, the estimates of the Romanian military attachés in the main European capitals in connection with the evolution of the situation after the Austrian crisis proved to be true to fact.

The authorities in Berlin were keeping in touch and harmonized their actions with the leader of the Sudeten Germans, preparing obstinately the terrain for the escalation of the tensions; just overnight, Henlein was requesting from the government in Prague ever more rights for the Sudeten Germans, he was travelling frequently for instructions to Berlin and for explanations to London, while the German army was training for an offensive operation. A report of the Romanian military attaché in Prague explains: „From the information from the Czechoslovak Higher General Staff it results that, approximately until late September, the German Army would be on manoeuvres with all the army troops: each army corps separately, successively, therefore not all army corps at once; the reserves of the first two younger contingents have been called in and also the older contingent, that have already completed several weeks of active military training. All in all, by the end

[12] *Ibidem,* file no. 813, Cable no. 27, 13th March 1938, f. 143.

of September approximately 900 000 are concentrating, part of them at fortification works; each army corps will comprise two active divisions and a reserve one. Their purpose is considered at the Czechoslovak Higher General Staff as being rather training drill. In my opinion, and also in the opinion of other important people, it is therefore not out of the question that, taking into account the present situation, the accelerated erection of German fortifications on the French side and the extended duration of the manoeuvres, that these manoeuvres be part of the bulk of unrelenting pressure, economic propaganda measures, etc., kind of measures against Czechoslovakia, so as to force her to find a solution to the Sudeten issue."[13]

The escalation of the German-Czechoslovak conflict on the matter of the Sudeten was being closely monitored by both the Romanian military attachés and those in other European capitals. Despite a seeming relaxation, in all other parts of Central Europe and in the Balkans the tension was increasing, the political life was getting more and more radical, and the nationalistic, extremist and revisionist political currents were gaining ground in the countries defeated in the war. There were two particularly resounding political events that preceded the Sudeten crisis, much exaggerated by many presences in the public space. Under usual circumstances they might have gone unnoticed, in the end they were of interest merely to the diplomatic environment and, possibly, to the military circles. We are referring to the signing of the Thessaloniki Agreement[14] (31st of July 1938) and the Bled Conference (23rd of August 1938)[15], through which the Balkan Entente, respectively the

[13] A.M.R., Fond Defence Ministry, Office of the Minister, file no. 197, Cable no. 59 of 17th August 1938, f. 340.

[14] *Ibidem*.

[15] *„Slovo" states that, if one took a look on the interests and diplomatic activity of the three countries, one might boldly say that the Little Entente, in*

Little Entente, accepted to give up the military clauses imposed to Bulgaria and Hungary through the Peace Treaties. It seems that there is no connection between the two events (particularly the Thessaloniki Agreement) and the Czechoslovak crisis, increasingly present in the concerns of the western chancelleries. However, the Bulgarian officials saw a direct connection of the Thessaloniki Agreement to the Sudeten crisis, a fact quickly noted and transmitted to Bucharest. The Romanian military diplomat pointed out the fact that the Bulgarian leaders recognized in the Thessaloniki Agreement a first crack in the stipulation system imposed by the Treaty of Neuilly. They were saying openly that the time had come to eliminate every other „injustice" and, following the *Sudeten model (our italics)*, they hoped to integrate into their state the lost territories, especially Macedonia, but also Dobrudja. The attaché in Sofia described the atmosphere in the capital of Bulgaria, apparently paradoxical and hard to decipher: „The tenser the situation in Czechoslovakia is growing, the more obtrusive the press and the Bulgarian political circles are growingly pressing in their protests against „inequities" of the peace treaties and against the „pseudo-democrats who have created the present day Europe, with its hotbeds of injustice in every region of the Continent".[16]

In informal conversations, which the Romanian military attaché was not able to avoid, he heard insinuations that Romania had better hurry to return at least the Quadrilateral, so that the principle of peaceful revision might prevail: „It is now the turn of the other inhumanely pillaged countries: Hungary and Bulgaria... There are no moral considerations to make us be-

relation with the goals it had in mind and the role it should have played, has since long ago ceased to exist.

[16] *Ibidem,* f. 491-516, Report of the Romanian military attaché in Sofia regarding the internal and external situation of Bulgaria, 17th September 1938.

lieve that revision would stop at Czechoslovakia alone".[17] „Today in Czechoslovakia, tomorrow elsewhere, sooner or later, wherever there are such hotbeds, the crisis will act in one form or another, according to the events or circumstances which life is going to create or stir up. The general opinion in the Bulgarian political world and press may be resumed as follows: until the resolution of the present German-Czechoslovak conflict, Bulgaria must stay rigorously neutral, that is to await the development of the current events, and then to act according to circumstances[18] – transmitted the military attaché to Bucharest. And, in fact, the Romanian diplomat was giving information about an unnatural condition of quiet throughout the country, some kind of calm before the storm[19].

This is how the military attaché described the atmosphere created by the news that the Thessaloniki Agreement had been signed: "Seldom has it happened that a political event, either internal or external, had such a resounding echo in the Bulgarian press and public opinion, except for the birth of the Bulgarian heir to the throne, it has been a long time since this people was animated by a more intense enthusiasm than when hearing the news of the signing of this agreement. Throughout the entire country there were great demonstrations, public gatherings, ovations and torchlight processions. Army planes distributed thousands of leaflets as far as the remotest corners of the country. This fact was well understood by the thousands of Bulgarian citizens in Sofia who practically were struggling hand-to-hand to grasp the leaflets launched by the some 30 airplanes, leaflets announcing that: „Today, an agreement has been signed between Bulgaria and our neighbours, cancelling all military restrictions imposed by the Treaty of Neuilly.

[17] *Ibidem.*
[18] *Ibidem.*
[19] *Ibidem.*

From this day on, our people obtains its full independence and is entitled to organize the defence of its land and freedom. Long live our wise Tsar! Long live the free and independent Bulgaria!" In every garrison there took place actions during which the garrison commanders read out loud and extended comments on the Agreement signed in Thessaloniki. In Sofia, the defence Minister, general Daskalov, accompanied by the Chief of the Higher General Staff, general Peev, by the commander of the 1st Army – general Lucas, and by many other generals and high ranking officers of the garrison, read the order of the day to the officers and the troops in several locations. Govedarov, president of the Parliamentary Commission for foreign affairs, said as follows:

„The Thessaloniki Agreement is the beginning of a new era in the relations and practice of the Balkan peoples. It gives Bulgaria, as a State and a Nation, threefold moral gratification:

Firstly: the solemn recognition on the part of the Balkan states that Bulgaria is in favour of the strengthening policy of the Balkan peace and that she is willing to keep good neighbourly and loyal cooperation relations.

Secondly: the guarantee of the opportunity for the triumphant Bulgarian Army to prepare in all calm for becoming again united, powerful and awe inspiring.

But thirdly, and most importantly: the Bulgarians' sacred faith in the triumph of human justice is fully restored and reinforced. This agreement is a beautiful precedent for the peaceful revision of the peace treaties, directly by the interested states and peoples."

Particular attention for the events in Czechoslovakia was given by the assistant military attaché in London – captain Gheorghe Iliescu. He transmitted to Bucharest, short time after the conclusion of the Munich Conference (on October 2nd,

1938), a comprehensive report – in fact a true record – concerning the development stages of the Czech-Sudeten-German conflict, as well as Great Britain's action/position as to this strife.[20] Gheorghe Iliescu insisted upon the attempt of the British officials to intercede and mediate in this conflict, with the aim to save peace, be it even at the cost of the sacrifice of the Czechoslovak interests. Here are the main ideas in the Bulletin transmitted to Section 2 of the Romanian Higher General Staff:

„The entire action can be split into 5 stages:

a) Stage I: *The discussions between the Czech government and the Sudeten party based on the 8 programmatic points set up in Karlsbad and the appeal to England".* They hoped that the matter could remain simply a Czechoslovak issue, and this is why the British received Henlein's messengers already in June. The British could understand that the Sudeten were not at all happy with the compromises accepted by the Czech government with the Charter for Minorities. Captain Wiedeman – chancellor Hitler's right-hand man and his special envoy to London, transmitted to the British government that the Führer wanted an agreement with England after the satisfactory resolution of the Sudeten issue. He warned that Hitler would offer military assistance to the Sudeten if the latter were to rebel against the government in Prague. Facing such a situation, the London leaders hasted to urge the Czechs to accept new extensive and quick concessions in order to allow an understanding with the Sudeten. To this effect, they sent *lord Runciman* to the scene. Henlein – chief of the Sudeten party – refused to participate in the negotiations with the Czechoslovak government; he delegated his lieutenants to assist at the conferences. However, the latter were given precise instructions not to em-

[20] A.M.R., Fond Ministry of Air and Navy, file no. 2513, Information Bulletin, 2nd October 1938, signed Captain Iliescu Gheorghe, f. 524-542.

bark in any capital point, while he himself does not make any move without the approval from Chancellor Hitler, whom he conferred with almost daily. The suggestions of the British emissary were rejected by the Sudeten leaders.

b) Stage II: *Germany's interference and the period of the Nazi Party Rally in Nuremberg, September 10-12.* Hitler imposed conditions for this arrangement, requesting that Czechoslovakia should denounce the alliance treaties with France and the U.S.S.R. He warned that he would propose at least one referendum to show the wish of the Sudeten to be incorporated into the Reich. At the same time – under the excuse of manoeuvres, the German army increased its manpower to about 2 million people. On the 12th of September, at the Nuremberg Party Rally, Hitler stated: Germany consented once to dire sacrifices, now it is formidably armed and wants to carry out „with no referendum" the annexation of the regions occupied by the Sudeten.

c) Stage III: *The Ultimatum delivered by Henlein to the Czechoslovak government. The first trip of the British prime-minister to Munich. The Anglo-French Plan.* On the 13th of September, Konrad Henlein delivered to the Czechoslovak government an ultimatum notice, which asked for meeting the requests of the Sudeten in six hours time. The British were sure that war was going to break out immediately and that France – due to the alliance treaty – would be compelled to step in, which would have called for an England's intervention. King George VI cut short his stay at Balmoral. A French military mission arrived secretly to London on that day and was quite lengthy in conference with the British Imperial General Staff.

But in the late evening of September 15th there came the announcement that the British prime minister would fly the next day to Munich in order to meet with Hitler and discuss with him the matter of Czechoslovakia.

The visit had been agreed upon following consultations with the French government, which was certain that France was neither ready nor willing to fight for Czechoslovakia. The French General Staff blamed a weakness in the army because of the new social laws that had disturbed the French war industry, the population had been infected with the germ of communism, the French aviation was very weak in point of both equipment and morale, because of minister Cot and especially general Denain, and other strategic considerations, including the idea that they could not rely on the support of the U.S.S.R. Upon the return of the prime minister, the news leaked – from informants – that Hitler had requested „the annexation with no referendum" of the Sudeten regions and that he had extended one week for getting a reply. Several council meetings were held in London in the presence of the French prime minister and of lord Runciman and, in the end, a so-called Anglo-French Plan was adopted. No need for me to elaborate on this plan, since it was not implemented but, all in all, it provided for relinquishing the Sudeten region and granting for the integrity of the remaining Czechoslovak territory by Germany, Poland, Romania, Yugoslavia and Hungary, and a „super-guarantee" from Germany, France, Italy and England. After having been made public, the Plan made a deplorable impression because it meant treason for Czechoslovakia. The reaction both in political circles and in the public opinion was quite strong, but Chamberlain went on and sent the document to Prague.

After the visit of the Hungarian and Polish delegates with Hitler (September 21st), the situation worsened: Hungary and Poland were encouraged to claim territories from Czechoslovakia. Under these conditions, Prague's reply (September 22nd) had no significance any more, and nobody was accepting any more negotiation or stalling. Nevertheless, Chamberlain left the next day (September 23rd) in Godesberg for a new meeting

with the Führer, while the representatives of Paris in Prague were pressing the Czechoslovak government to urge it to accept the Plan immediately and unconditionally. Finally, the Plan was accepted (to no avail!), the government resigned and a new cabinet was formed by general Syrový.

d) Stage IV: *A new meeting Chamberlain-Hitler in Godesberg.* The British prime minister learned to his bewilderment that the concession Prague was cornered to accept did not matter any more, as the general situation had changed. The next morning meeting had remained purposeless, so that the British prime minister sent a letter to the German Chancellor, who replied at once through an extensive Memorandum, which could be translated in three hours time. Here are the main points it contained:

1. Until the 1st of October, the Czechoslovak Army had to leave the Sudeten and the other regions marked on the map attached to the Memorandum, so that the German police could take its place.

2. The Sudeten regions had to be annexed immediately to Germany, and in the regions with a German minority a referendum had to be held.

3) Germany did not accept to guarantee the new borders unless it was accepted by Hungary and Poland too.

4) The Czech army had to be demobilized at once.

5) The military in the government had to be replaced immediately.

6) Resignation of President Beneš.

In the end, the British prime minister replied that he could not take on the task to make the Czechs to accept. At his departure, Chamberlain had a last discussion with Hitler and made him again the proposal to come to an amicable resolution of the incident, but [the proposal] was dismissed. Chamberlain was entirely compromised before the British.

At that moment, the prime minister was convinced that war could not be avoided any more. A Council meeting was convened for the 26th of September, when also French officials were going take part, too, including general Gamelin, accompanied by colonel Petibon. Simultaneously, military measures specific for belligerence status were taken in London. They were expecting the German reaction, which strengthened even more the belief in the outbreak of the war. However, the British prime-minister dispatched Sir Horace Wilson to Berlin in order to make new proposals to Hitler, once again with no outcome.

Under these circumstances, on the evening of September 27, Chamberlain addressed the nation, emphasizing: his endeavours for maintaining the peace, the crushing conditions imposed by Germany to Czechoslovakia, the fact that, in case of war, England would fight for the idea of not imposing right by force, his hope that his last efforts would bring peace".[21]

Secretly, he attempted one last action: he sent a letter to Mussolini, so as to convince the Germans. At the same time there were flowing in news about pressure from other countries, as for instance the United States of America, which had displaced their fleet to that area, while the U.S.S.R. made formal assurances that they would intervene next to England in support of Czechoslovakia.

The prime minister held one more speech in the House of Commons, which was broadcast, but interrupted by a message from Berlin, announcing that Hitler had accepted a conference with the participation of England, Italy, France and Germany. Chamberlain and Daladier travelled to Munich, on the 29th of September, although the Germans had already announced that they would make no concession.

Finally, the Romanian attaché described quite extensively the content of the events connected to the Conference as such,

[21] *Ibidem.*

events which he orders into the so-called Stage V: *The Munich Agreement.* „In Munich there came together the prime ministers of Germany, Italy, England and France and, after discussions, they arrived to the conclusion of the Agreement which I am rendering below in full:

Agreement concluded at Munich, September 29, 1938, between Germany, Great Britain, France and Italy

Germany, the United Kingdom, France and Italy, taking into consideration the agreement, which has been already reached in principle for the cession to Germany of the Sudeten German territory, have agreed on the following terms and conditions governing the said cession and the measures consequent thereon, and by this agreement they each hold themselves responsible for the steps necessary to secure its fulfilment:

(1) The evacuation will begin on 1st October.

(2) The United Kingdom, France and Italy agree that the evacuation of the territory shall be completed by the 10th October, without any existing installations having been destroyed, and that the Czechoslovak Government will be held responsible for carrying out the evacuation without damage to the said installations.

(3) The conditions governing the evacuation will be laid down in detail by an international commission composed of representatives of Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Italy and Czechoslovakia.

(4) The occupation by stages of the predominantly German territory by German troops will begin on 1st October. The four territories marked on the attached map will be occupied (…) by the 10th of October.

(5) The international commission referred to in paragraph 3 will determine the territories in which a plebiscite is to be

held. These territories will be occupied by international bodies until the plebiscite has been completed. The same commission will fix the conditions in which the plebiscite is to be held, taking as a basis the conditions of the Saar plebiscite. The commission will also fix a date, not later than the end of November, on which the plebiscite will be held.

(6) The final determination of the frontiers will be carried out by the international commission. (…)

(7) There will be a right of option into and out of the transferred territories, the option to be exercised within six months from the date of this agreement. (...)

The Agreement was accompanied by five Attachments, with detailed explanations of certain articles. On September 30th, Hitler met Chamberlain and they signed an arrangement with the following content: „We, the German Führer and the British prime minister had a new meeting today and agreed to recognize that the issue of Anglo-German relations is of the first importance for both countries and for Europe.

We consider the agreement signed tonight and the Anglo-German naval treaty as a symbol of the wish of our peoples to never go to war against each other.

We decided that the consultation method would be the method chosen for discussing any other subject matter that could be of interest for our countries and we are determined to continue our efforts to delete the causes of potential differences and to contribute to assure peace in Europe.

This document made a very bad impression in the political circles, as it is beleived that by this pact England would separate from France, who thus became a second rate power. Several ministers reached in their resignation, while in the military milieus criticism was expressed openly".[22]

[22] *Ibidem.*

The chief of the French military mission in Czechoslovakia – general Louis Eugene Faucher, reported to his minister of defence: "The interventions of France and Great Britain in Prague produced in the country and especially in military circles violent outrage which increased in intensity when the ultimatum acceptance by the Czechoslovak government got to be known".[23]

Out of solidarity and to save his honour, the French general asked, "... to be relieved immediately from his position as a mission chief" on the grounds that "I can not agree with the breach of our commitments or, what is even worse, with their mystification..."[24] He was strongly impressed by the reaction of his Czechoslovak fellows, who blamed him: "What have you done? Hitler threatened to execute us and you took it upon yourselves to inflict it /.../ You are making us suffer an unprecedented humiliation giving to Hitler without any fight and, practically, no opposition, our fortifications. We are cruelly punished for our loyalty to France! What has been left today of France's moral prestige? Which is now her place in the world? France is participating – so the saying goes – in guaranteeing our new frontiers. But what kind of trust can be still places in her once she has broken her word?" [25]

Finally, the last report we are submitting for your attention is a Report of the Romanian military attaché[26] in Prague, drawn up three weeks aster the Munich Conference. The Romanian attaché was reporting about the attention shown to him by the most important Czechoslovak military personalities: the

[23] Apud: Viorica Moisuc, *Premisele izolării poltice a României, [Prerequisites of the political isolation of Romania. 1919–1940],* Humanitas, Bucharest, 1991, pp. 345-346.

[24] *Ibidem.*

[25] *Ibidem*, p. 347.

[26] A.M.R., Fond Ministry of Air and Navy, file no. 201, Cable no. 831, of 26th October 1938, f. 186.

generals Ludvík Krejčí, Emil Fiala, Miroslav Miklík, Vladimír Kajdoš and colonel František Hájek. On this occasion, all of them displayed the most beautiful feelings of sympathy for Romania, the only one that had all the time demonstrated her loyal friendship. Lieutenant-colonel Eftimiu renders, against this background, the state of mind of the Czech officials, who „... when they were showing me the present situation of the Republic, their eyes were moist, on the verge of spilling tears".[27]

The reports of the military attachés constituted the main intelligence channels; they supplied analyses for the decision-taking factors in Bucharest, who prepared the appropriate answers for every situation. This proved that Romania had remained a loyal ally, that refused to be part in the tearing apart of the Czechoslovak state, providing instead moral support in those dramatic moments.

[27] *Ibidem.*

Potential Soviet Military Assistance to Czechoslovakia in 1938 and the Question of Transit Corridor for Soviet Troops Across Romania

Emil Voráček

The Czechoslovak-Soviet Treaty of Alliance signed by President Edvard Beneš and Sergei Sergeievich Alexandrovsky on 16 May 1935 in Prague did not contain any amendment on military cooperation specifying the nature and level of mutual assistance in case of a third-state attack against either party. The Soviet potential aid to Czechoslovakia was subject to the assistance provided by France, the key ally of Czechoslovakia. Of great importance for the security of Czechoslovakia within the intentions of the Treaty, however, were the contacts of military officials.[1] Both parties had also to plan the route of the potential aid to Czechoslovakia, the most probably logical corridor being across Romania, a Little Entente ally of Czechoslovakia. The strictly negative position of Poland in the matter of any potential transit of Soviet troops across the Rzeczpospolita was generally known. The resistance of Polish leaders to any penetration of Soviet influence into Central Europe was well expressed by some statements that Romania's Foreign Minister Victor Ion Antonescu could hear during his visit to

[1] Apart from the author of the present study and also Zdeněk Sládek, this topic has been dealt with only by Alevtina Pokorná, *Chronologie československo–sovětských vojenských, vojensko–politických a vojensko–ekonomických vztahů 1934–1939* [Chronology of Czechoslovak-Soviet military, political and economic relations 1934-1939]. In: Historie a vojenství, No. 5, 1977, pp. 153–172; Same, *Vzájemné vztahy mezi armádami ČSR a SSSR v polovině 30. let* [Mutual relations between the Czechoslovak and the Soviet Armies]. In: Historie a vojenství, No. 3, 1981, pp. 52–72.

Warsaw late in 1936.[2] It was particularly the statement that he heard at the top political level of Poland and that he shortly afterwards reproduced to Czechoslovak envoy Jan Šeba: *"With the Soviet-Czechoslovak alliance the Czechoslovak Republic has become an avant-garde or trunk of Red Russia in Central Europe."*[3] Warsaw also opposed the Little Entente. Jan Šeba obtained similar information also from the Chief of General Staff of Romanian Army, Gen. Nicolae Samsonovici.[4]

The Anschluss of Austria on 12 March 1938 and its forced annexation into the III German Reich was an essential moment showing what Hitler's policy was aiming at. Czechoslovakia's geopolitical situation dramatically changed as the western part of the country, the Bohemian Lands, was now practically surrounded by the Reich. The reaction of European Powers was, however, very different, even contradictory. The development of European politics in spring 1938 was certainly not too favorable to Czechoslovakia, or at least it appeared so to the then foreign political observers. The international position of Czechoslovakia deteriorated even more after the *Anschluss* of Austria by Hitler's Germany in March 1938. Except Romania, all its neighbors were now enemies. The fundamental line of Czechoslovak foreign policy and its security principles in the new situation following the Anschluss of Austria were explained by Foreign Minister Kamil Krofta in his instruction of 21 April 1938 to Czechoslovak envoy Zdeněk Fierlinger by referring to the essential statement of the new French Minister of Foreign Affairs Joseph P. Boncour: *"The relation Paris-Prague-*

[2] Archiv ministerstva zahraničních věcí (AMZV), Praha [Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, Prague], Fond Representation in Bucharest 1937–1939, report by J. Šeba of 08. 01. 1937. Czechoslovak envoy to Romania Jan Šeba regularly described in his reports details of the Romanian-Soviet relations.

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] *Ibid.*, report by J. Šeba of 08. 01. 1937. Reg. No. 42/conf. 1937.

Moscow has always been governed by the principle that Prague would never take any initiative and that it would not negotiate its military matters alone. Paris has said several times that we cannot do this in our exposed situation and due to our loyalty to Poland and Romania. We can only join what has been previously agreed on between Paris and Moscow, like we did in the case of political treaty previously negotiated between them. Romania, too, may accept what has been agreed by Paris and Moscow, but it would not accept it from us."[5]

Soviet foreign policy closely watched the developments after the Anschluss of Austria indicating the direction of Nazi Germany's policy. Nevertheless, the Anschluss was no surprise to the Soviets and neither was the fact that the next object of interest would be Czechoslovakia. In spite of that, the Soviet Union continued supporting the policy of collective security, of common fight against the aggressor. This was confirmed one day after the Anschluss by People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs Maxim M. Litvinov who, when asked by American journalists what the USSR intended to do in case of an attack against the Czechoslovak Republic, replied that *"we shall certainly meet our alliance obligations."*[6] And his answer to the next question, how the USSR could help, was that *"some corridor will certainly be found."*[7] The Soviet Union took a rather reserved position in its relation to Czechoslovakia. In his instruction to the Soviet envoy to Czechoslovakia of 26 March 1938 People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs M. M. Litvinov

[5] *Ibid.*, Representation in Moscow, K. Krofta's instructions to envoy Zd. Fierlinger of 21. 04. 1938. The significance of the record does not consist in the Czechoslovak defense strategy being unknown, but in its key elements being communicated and stressed to the Soviet envoy.

[6] *Ibid.*, Representation in Moscow 1938/39, fol. 58, TD Reg. No. 218/38, Fierlinger 16. 03. 1938.

[7] *Ibid.*

was quite pessimistic as to the immediate future of the small Central European democratic state and concluded: *"Anyway, Czechoslovakia cannot survive long in its current besiege.[...] The Anschluss ensures Hitler's hegemony in Europe, irrespective of the further fate of Czechoslovakia."*[8] And Litvinov reiterated the idea that he had formulated several weeks before and he stressed it even more now: *"I have always considered the Austrian and the Czechoslovak question to be interconnected. A violation of Czechoslovakia would constitute the beginning of an Anschluss in the same way as a Hitlerization of Austria would predetermine the fate of Czechoslovakia..."*[9] Simultaneously, he indicated the probable evolution of further steps to be taken by the Soviet Union that would mean a way toward isolationism, reflecting to some degree the disappointment over the approach of western democratic Powers to the question of collective security and defense against the expansionism of Hitler's Third Reich: *"My declaration is probably the last call for co-operation, after which we shall probably take the position of little interest in the developments in Europe."*[10] Litvinov's pessimistic statement in his instruction to Alexandrovsky was referring to his declaration at the press conference of 17 March 1938 that Soviet diplomacy considered very important and that contained a call for cooperation and reinforcement of collec-

[8] Архив внешней политики Российской Федерации, (АВП РФ) Moskva, фонд 0138, опись 19, папка 128, дело 1, л. 16. Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, (AFP RF) Moskva, Fond 0138, op. 19, p. 128, d. 1, fol. 16. Quoted also by Russian author: Сергей Зиновевич СЛУЧ, Советский Союз и чехословацкий кризис. Некоторые аспекты политики невмешательства [The Soviet Union and the Czechoslovak crisis of 1938, some aspects of the policy of non-interference]. In: *Мюнхенское соглашение 1938 года. История и современность*. Moscow 2009, p. 118.

[9] АВП РФ, ф. 0138, оп. 19, д, 1, л. 16. AFP RF, f. 0138, op. 19, p. 128, d. 1, fol. 16.

[10] *Ibid.*, fol. 17.

tive security.[11] *"First of all, there is a threat to Czechoslovakia and then, since aggression is infectious, there is a danger that it will expand and cause new international conflicts, as already reflected in the dangerous situation on the Polish-Lithuanian border..."*[12]

A strategic meeting was held by the Soviet leadership late in April 1938 to assess the situation in Central Europe. The Soviet "polpred", political representative to Czechoslovakia, was also invited. On his way to Moscow, however, S. S. Alexandrovsky stayed for a couple of days in Bucharest where he met the new Romanian Foreign Minister Nicolae Petrescu-Comnen on 14 April. As reported by Alexandrovsky, Petrescu-Comnen – while characterizing the foreign political chances of Romania – said that *"Romania as a small state cannot but follow one policy: wait and observe."*[13] And before that Petrescu-Comnen stated that *"he did not see any contradiction between the Soviet and the Romanian foreign policy as both countries pursued the same basic lines: 1.collective security; 2. strengthening of the League of Nations; 3. inviolability of all existing borders."*[14] This, however, was all, and according to the above report Petrescu–Comnen was not ready to go into details of these general theses and the talks did not produce any more results. In the evening, S. S. Alexandrovsky also met Radulescu, Romanian Air Force commander, in the Czechoslovak legation in the presence of Czechoslovak envoy Ferdinand Veverka. They discussed the possibility of an air line Prague-Moscow via Uzhhorod and Cluj that had been negotiated for three years and the strategic

[11] АВП РФ, ф. 0138, оп. 19, п. 128, д. 1, 17. AFP RF, f. 0138, op. 19, p. 128, d. 1, fol. 17.

[12] *Mnichov v dokumentech I.* [Munich in documents I.]. Státní naklatatelstni politické literatury, Praha 1958, p. 26.

[13] Dokumenty vnešnej politiki SSSR, (DVP), t. XXI, Documents of the Foreign Policy of the USSR, Vol. XXI, Moscow 1977, doc. No. 132, p. 197.

[14] DVP, *Ibid.*

importance of which was clear to all parties. Romania's condition was to organize a three-sided conference and ensure the participation of Romania in the project so that it did not stay "ex lex". No progress could be achieved during the talks and the disappointed S. S. Alexandrovsky, who had expected more from his negotiations in Bucharest, left for Moscow via Warsaw next day.[15]

The above mentioned meeting organized by the Soviet leadership took place on 21 April 1938 afternoon[16] and was attended, in addition to Josif V. Stalin, Vyacheslav M. Molotov, Kliment J. Voroshilov, Lazar M. Kaganovich and other Politburo Members, also by Maxim M. Litvinov. Polpred (political representative) S. S. Alexandrovsky held a large exposé on the political situation in Czechoslovakia.[17] In his message to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on this important meeting Zdeněk Fierlinger referred to the information that he had obtained from S. S. Alexandrovsky: *"After listening to Alexandrovsky's speech the following was decided on: The USSR, if asked for assistance, is ready to take in agreement with France and Czechoslovakia all measures concerning the security of Czechoslovakia. It possesses the means needed for it. The state of the Army and Air Force allows it. Voroshilov is very optimistic. The willingness to provide efficient aid will always be here, unless Czechoslovakia gives up the democratic policy."*[18] Alexandrovsky said during his

[15] He went to Bucharest from Prague with passenger car, three weeks later returned back again via Romania, again without success. He travelled across Czechoslovakia and sent a report to Litvinov on what he had learned.

[16] *Na prijome u Stalina. Tetradi (žurnaly) zapisej lic, prinjatych I. V. Stalinym (1924–1953)* [Received by Stalin. Journals of persons received by Y. V. Stalin (1924–1953)]. Moscow 2008, pp. 235–236.

[17] Wording of this exposé could not be identified yet.

[18] AMZV, Praha, Politické zprávy Moskva 1938, (Fond Representation in Moscow 1938). No 48, Report of 23. 04. 1938.

negotiations with Fierlinger that he was authorized to communicate these conclusions directly to President Beneš. The polpred was also rather pessimistic as to the position of Romania: *"As to Romania, Alexandrovsky thinks that no particular negotiations are recommended."*[19] Several days later, on 28 April Fierlinger met Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs Vladimir P. Potiomkin, who confirmed the conclusions of the meeting.[20]

Czechoslovak leadership reckoned in the case of crisis with a potential direct military assistance by the Red Army, with strong air support, and in the diplomatic field, with USSR's diplomatic pressure on Poland to refrain from any activities against the Czechoslovak Republic. However, no significant steps were taken to prepare coordinated actions and logistical support. Any action of land forces was not feasible due to Romania's negative position. Moreover, from the USSR through the Romanian territory to Ruthenia belonging to Czechoslovakia at that time, there was only one railway through mountain passes, the roads and bridges required reinforcement and other improvements of the infrastructure were needed, so that they were unsuitable for the transit of heavy machines. No airfield was technically up-to-date to serve large numbers of aircraft of types that were not used in Czechoslovakia, except for the light bombers SB-2. On the other hand, the Polish government was not ready to allow the transit of Soviet troops across its territory.

The transport lines between Czechoslovakia and Romania were important also from another point of view. President Beneš in his considerations, to some extent based also on the experience from the First World War, attached much signifi-

[19] *Ibid.*

[20] *Ibid.* No. 53, fol. 109. Report of 28. 04. 1938.

cance to preserving the sovereignty symbols of the Czechoslovak state, including the Army. Remembering the Serbian Army, whose part after heavy battles withdrew from the Serbian territory to continue representing the sovereign Serbian state, Beneš's considerations were based on defense concepts of the Czechoslovak state prepared by the Army Headquarters and approved by him. It was important in this connection that he personally informed the Soviet polpred Alexandrovsky about these plans on 18 May 1938 (of course, Romanian military officials were first consulted through military channels). S. S. Alexandrovsky in his record, a copy of which was also given to Stalin, who was receiving from April on all reports on the developments in Czechoslovakia from the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, reproduced Beneš's explanation of the Czechoslovak concept of defense as follows: *"The strategic plan of Czechoslovakia aims at preventing the enemy from invading the country from the north or the south. The network of forts along the northern border is excellent and 'nothing can happen there.' The network of forts along the southern border has been completed and must only be complemented in Slovakia, south of Hodonín. This will be accomplished soon. Thus, the only possible attack is from west to east. This is the line that the Czechoslovak Army will be retreating along, fighting for every piece of land. Correspondingly, three defense lines are being built. The first one is along the Vltava River, and the Army will defend Prague with all its forces; the second line goes across Czechoslovakia, along the Bohemian-Moravian Heights, while the third line follows the Moravian-Slovakian border, namely in Moravian Slovakia. If no assistance is provided to Czechoslovakia, they can fight and continue retreating eastward for three, or*

even four months. [...]"[21] Beneš also stressed that *"all his efforts will concentrate on saving the Army, at least its parts that will carry on the independence of Czechoslovakia, will fight within foreign armies, and will return back to the country as victors."*[22] The significance of the common border with Romania and of the suitable transit ways was even more evident for the above mentioned potential withdrawal.

The possibility of potential transit of troops across Romania was further studied by Soviet diplomacy. Soviet diplomatic messages contained regular calls for at least basic measures to be taken. The minimum step was supposed to be the start of regular air transport from Czechoslovakia to the USSR via Romania. Nevertheless, the line was not put into operation in spite of the promising negotiations in 1935 and the short existence of an air line.[23] Working air connection with Europe was of utmost importance for the Soviet Union at that time. In spring 1938 there was no direct air connection between Moscow and Central and Western Europe. Air lines across Sweden were not available, either, as the Swedish side made use of the existing situation and required additional payments for flights via Fondholm. Maxim M. Litvinov considered this fact alarming and therefore he sent a letter to Stalin dated 21 April 1938 requiring to speed up the negotiations with Czechoslovakia: *"We have remained without air connection with Europe. [...]*

[21] АВП, ф. 05, оп. 18, п. 149, д. 168, л. 20. (AFP f. 05, op. 18, p. 149, d. 168, fol. 20). S. Alexandrovsky's record of his interview with E. Beneš on 18. 5. 1938 published (incomplete) in: *Dokumenty a materiály československo – sovětských vztahů* (DMČSSV), dil. 3. [Documents and materials on Czechoslovak – soviet relations, part. 3], Academia, Praha, 1979, p. 463. However, no signature of its file in archival fond is available here.

[22] AFP, *Ibid.*

[23] ČSA [Czechoslovak Airlines] used here a two-engine Airspeed Envoy plane.

I would consider it necessary to speed up the negotiations on restoration of the air line to Prague. An obstacle to this is Romania's demand concerning its share of it. As Alexandrovsky has informed us, Romania insists on this demand. As Romania is unable to operate its own air fleet, I believe that it cannot insist on the employment of their pilots, either, which is what we oppose. Czechoslovakia and Romania must be invited to send their representatives to Moscow for final talks."[24] The aim of this policy was not to allow Romanian pilots and mechanics to enter Soviet territory. As regular flights of transport airplanes from the USSR to Czechoslovakia via Romania were of military importance, the Soviet authorities strictly controlled any access to its territory, which constituted also a complication for the SB bomber transits to Czechoslovakia because the Soviet side rejected the proposal that the Czechoslovak pilots flying the airplanes from Kiev to Czechoslovakia across Romania be allowed to travel to Kiev by air.[25]

The negotiations of Soviet authorities with Romanian officials in this matter were part of broader problems and diplomatic talks. Maxim M. Litvinov repeatedly described them in detail in his letters to Stalin in spring 1938, namely on 25 April. Litvinov characterized the Romanian policy as follows: *"The current Romanian government as well as the previous one*

[24] Российский государственный архив социально-политической истории, Moscow (РГАСПИ, RGASPI), фонд 17, опись 166, дело 588 (особая папка), л. 92. Russian state archive of social–political history, Fond 17, opis. 166, delo 588 [special file], Protocol No. 60 session PB CK VKP(b) of 25. 04. 1938, item 92, fol. 92, letter from M. Litvinov to I. Stalin of 21. 04. 1938.

[25] RGASPI, Fond 17, copy 166, delo 588 (special file), Protocol No. 58 session PB CK VKP (b) of 11-21. 2, item 21, fol. 2. 1938. Request was rejected "as a questionable and useless matter". The arrival of only two planes was requested. Potiomkin, who transmitted the Czechoslovak request to the Politburo in a letter, recommended the use of planes to accelerate the transfer of pilots.

(Titulescu) does not intend to be openly hostile to the USSR. This is not little; nevertheless, this would not prevent the Tătărescu government and Comnen from seeking stronger ties to Poland and playing with Germany."[26]

The creation of an air line was naturally also in Czechoslovakia's interest. Zdeněk Fierlinger repeatedly reminded from Moscow that *"here, they do not understand well why the Romanians are so sluggish; they have been invited to Moscow together with us to negotiate on a tripartite air agreement whose implementation is a condition that the Romanians themselves required. Narkominděl would appreciate some pressure on our part in Bucharest. This connection is of increased importance to us in view of the growing difficulty of transit across Poland.*"[27] Fierlinger, of course, had to comply with the instructions coming from Prague and therefore, in an interview with the French Ambassador to Moscow, Robert Coulondre, he communicated the position of President Beneš: *"Coulondre explains it so that the President probably does not want to exert any pressure on France and let her have initiative in view of the French public opinion. The question of Soviet Army transit would not be raised for the time being and only the general affirmative or negative standpoint of Romania and Poland in the case of conflict would be sought, without mentioning the USSR. Actually, this has already been done today by Romania with the affirmative statement by Comnen, whereas Warsaw sticks to the bilateral nature of the Pact.*"[28] Czechoslovakia was facing an immediate danger of military invasion by Germany, as expressed by a French dip-

[26] РГАСПИ, ф. 17, оп. 166, д. 589, Особая папка, Протокол заседания ПБ ЦК ВКП(б) 28. 04.–01. 06. 1938, fol 25. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 166, d. 589, (special file), Protocol No. 60 session PB CK VKP(b) of 28. 04.–01. 06. 1938, fol. 25.

[27] AMZV, Praha, politické zprávy Moskva 1938, Representation in Moscow, 1938. fol. 115, report of 20. 05. 1938.

[28] *Ibid.*, fol. 121, report of 28. 05. 1938.

lomat referring to negotiations in France: *"In view of the Soviet intentions to implement the Pact Paris intends to initiate concrete negotiations and to ask us whether we are ready to negotiate. Should our reply be affirmative, parallel talks would start. No convention is meant; only a study of the defense potential. Coulondre added that he was exceeding his competences by giving me this information, and he therefore asks for discretion."*[29]

Two weeks later Zdeněk Fierlinger referred to this negotiation during his meeting with Maxim M. Litvinov. Litvinov complained again about the difficulties on the part of Romania. He had also spoken in the meantime with Envoy Coulondre. Therefore, the People's Commissar asked Coulondre also about the position of Romania: *"Coulondre pointed to Comnen's recent statement; still, he admitted that Romania strongly opposed a Russian intervention. […] meaning that the transit of land troops does not appear practical; a better solution must be sought."*[30] Litvinov complained with the Czechoslovak titular about the problems of creating civil air transit to Czechoslovakia: *"According to Litvinov the transit across Romania is also important since an immediate territorial connection must be available, not to mention the immediate assistance by air. I have asked if in the case of Russian intervention the transit states can obtaine full territorial guarantee. Litvinov replied that they naturally can, and pointed to Titulescu's formula reckoning with a withdrawal behind the Dniester. I stressed the necessity of a concrete agreement Paris-Moscow."*[31]

Within the series of talks Coulondre's suggestion of Soviet bombers flying to France across Romania and Czechoslovakia was rather ignored. It was probably but a mere diplomatic probe of Paris as explained by Litvinov to Fierlinger on 9 June:

[29] *Ibid.*

[30] *Ibid.*, fol. 135. Fierlinger's report of 19. 06. 1938

[31] *Ibid.*

"Coulondre developed on that occasion again his idea of Soviet airplanes flying to France while using Czechoslovak territory. This would in his opinion fill the gap that exists today in their own French aviation, and moreover, Soviet air raids on German industrial cities could be better organized from the Czechoslovak and French territory. […] Litvinov did not respond to this idea of Coulondre, probably because he failed to have a notion of the suggestions made and he did not want to comment on Coulondre's opinion."[32]

The tripartite conference of Soviet, Czechoslovak and Romanian representatives on the Prague-Moscow air line was finally held in Moscow from 4 to 18 July. Each delegation submitted a separate plan. The following discussion revealed a conflict between the Romanian and the Soviet concepts: *"The fixation of future air route became an extremely hot question. The Romanians suggested a formulation whose adoption would generally mean that the Soviet-Romanian border followed the Dniester line. Our proposal suggesting an appropriate change to the formulation was apparently unwelcome. Czechoslovak delegation, having declared that the discussion on this item was not its concern, proposed a formulation of its own trying to reconcile the two parties. The question was passed on the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs to settle it in diplomatic way."*[33]

Naturally, the Soviet leadership formulated its interests a little differently than in its internal communication and meetings, or within the strategic concepts of Soviet foreign policy. Its major features were pragmatism and certain political realism. Viewed from this Soviet macro-perspective a partial limiting element was the fact that the Soviet assistance was

[32] *Ibid.*, fol. 139, rub. Fierlinger's report of 18. 05. 1938.

[33] DVP, XXI. d., *Ibid.*, text in footnote, No. 48 on p. 709; AMZV, Praha, Representation in Moscow 1938, fol. 197. Fierlinger's report of 19. 07. 1938.

subject to military assistance to Czechoslovakia by France; i.e., on condition that France provides assistance to Czechoslovakia in case of aggression. This, however, was essential to Czechoslovakia. Soviet officials repeatedly reminded not only Czechoslovak, but also French and British representatives of this fact. Soviet People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs Maxim M. Litvinov reconfirmed this to French chargé d'affaires Jean Payart in Moscow on 2 September 1938 in the beginning of the September crisis.[34] Still, Soviet systematic efforts to maintain the policy of collective security making use of all existing mechanisms and tools of international politics cannot be denied. Its leadership took a number of diplomatic steps in that year to support Czechoslovakia.

The Soviet leadership was aware of the western attitude to the growing tension in Central Europe, as follows from one of Litvinov's instructions to Alexandrovsky in summer 1938, on 11 August: *"We are naturally highly interested in maintaining the independence of Czechoslovakia, in preventing Hitler's expansion to the South-East, but without the Western Powers we can hardly undertake anything essential; they consider it necessary to strive for our co-operation, while they ignore us simultaneously and decide alone in the matters related to the German-Czechoslovak conflict. It is not known to us that Czechoslovakia itself would have ever reminded its western friends of the necessity of inviting the USSR to join them."*[35] It was particularly important that the western Powers accept the USSR's participation in the settlement of European problems, recognize it as an equal partner to take part in essential conferences and present there its standpoints. However, the governments of Powers committed to the policy of appeasement

[34] AMZV, Praha, Fond Krofta Archives, box. 3, record of K. Krofta's interview with S. S. Alexandrovsky on 03. 09. 1938.

[35] АВП, ф. 0138, оп. 19, п. 128, д. 1, лл. 3–54. AFP, Fond 0138, op. 19, p. 128, d. 1, fol. 3–54.

were not ready to accept that. Maxim M. Litvinov, who was increasingly disappointed, referred primarily to the information from Soviet envoy to Paris, Yakov Z. Surits, and from the envoy to London, Ivan M. Maisky,[36] who repeatedly pointed to that attitude of western democratic Powers, and also of still large colonial empires with their interests and their fear of Soviet Communism. Based on this, he in his instructions to Sergey S. Alexandrovsky concluded that it was no good to publicly criticize England or France, meaning the *"in your talks with Beneš you may comply with these contemplations without stressing too much our indifference to European matters."*[37] This, of course, was often not the case.

When the Central European crisis was culminating, envoy Zdeněk Fierlinger would meet leading Soviet diplomats practically every day. The transit of Soviet troops across Romania was one of the questions most frequently asked by the Soviet side. Maxim M. Litvinov received Fierlinger shortly before leaving for Geneva: *"Litvinov added that without making clear the Romanian standpoint the Soviet Union can only hardly have a notion of what military action is feasible. Litvinov reiterated his suggestion that first general staff representatives meet."*[38] Fierlinger took many steps in the following days to make the negotiations progress, namely in the question of regular connection ČSR–USSR, but he did not succeed. He also asked the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Prague *"to immediately restore the civil air line. Do the same so that we immediately have connection. Send frequent situation reports. Potiomkin monitors the situa-*

[36] See the recent complete edition of wartime memoirs of I. M. Maisky, Soviet Ambassador to Great Britain: Ivan Mikhajlovich Maisky, *Dnevnik diplomata,* kniga 1., kniga. 2 [Diary of a diplomat, Book 1, Book 2]. Moscow 2006.

[37] *Ibid.*, fol. 54.

[38] AMZV, Praha, Representation in Moscow 1938, fol. 238 rub. Fierlinger's report from Moscow on 17. 09. 1938, USSR and Central European crisis.

tion and prepares a final decision for the government that will apparently be in line with the existing resolute policy."[39] Nevertheless, this initiative failed, particularly due to the general turbulent development culminating in Munich.

In spite of that, Moscow showed willingness to provide military assistance to Czechoslovakia in accordance with the relevant stipulations of the League of Nations Covenant and the Czechoslovak-Soviet Treaty of 1935. Its reserved position was in sharp contrast to that of western democracies, particularly of France as Czechoslovakia's ally. On the other hand, the USSR - in spite of its general reserved relation to Czechoslovakia - confirmed its readiness to meet its obligations by exerting pressure on and applying diplomatic tools to Poland during the September crisis.

In a situation when it was clear that the diplomatic game was approaching its final stage, a potential military conflict of Czechoslovakia with the blackmailing aggressor, the then state of Czechoslovak-Soviet-French alliance did not absolutely meet the defense needs of the country. Soviet representatives repeatedly called during the year 1938 for Franco-Czechoslovak negotiations at the general staff level. The French headquarters replied that the matter could be discussed with the French military attaché in Moscow. The Czechoslovak side responded in a similar way, in spite of the Army commanders declaring their readiness. At this stage, however, no potential military aid by the Soviet Union was feasible without speedily taking further steps. This, however, was not the case. It was necessary to take action, but in view of the internal developments in the Soviet Union and of the relation of western Powers to the Soviet Union no atmosphere favorable to real co-operation was available. The maneuvering space of Czechoslovak defense policy was

[39] AMZV, Praha, Representation in Moscow, fol. 248. Fierlinger's report of 24. 09. 1938.

shrinking. The Anschluss of Austria in March 1938 revealed with well-warning tones the difficult situation of Czechoslovakia. As the limitations for and the differentiation from the Soviet Union continued, the situation did not improve and another solution, namely active co-operation with the French Army failed to be intensely prepared. No agreement was reached in the key question of corridor for the Soviet troops to pass through to support Czechoslovakia as Poland was becoming increasingly hostile to Czechoslovakia. The position of Romania, Czechoslovakia's Little Entente partner, was not too favorable, either, mainly due to the question of Bessarabia and the Soviet attitude to it. The fact is that the USSR continued taking diplomatic steps in support of Czechoslovakia, namely through Maxim M. Litvinov's calls for strengthening collective security in Europe and through supporting Czechoslovakia in the spirit of the 1935 Treaty of Alliance. Apart from the diplomatic support the undisputable and most important Soviet contribution to the defense of Czechoslovakia was the prompt delivery of 60 Soviet all-metal bombers SB–2 developed by the design team headed by the designer Andrei N. Tupolev[40] (Czechoslovak code SB–71) in spring 1938.

Soviet Union, Red Army, and Czechoslovakia in the 1938 crisis[41]

One of the questions discussed until now and related to the 1938 crisis and the Munich Agreement is whether the Stalinist

[40] Andrei Nikolayevich Tupolev (1888–1972) headed since 1922 a design office of navy, combat and transport planes and air sleighs.

[41] This comes partly from Bohuslav Litera's study: Bohuslav Litera, *Ke vztahu Sovětského svazu, Rudá armáda a ČSR za krize v září 1938* [On the relation to the Soviet Union. Red Army and Czechoslovakia during the crisis of September 1938]. In: Per saecula ad tempera nostra. Collection of studies on the occasion of 60th anniversary of Prof. Jaroslav Pánek. (Eds.) Jiří Mikulec, Miloslav Polívka. Vol. 2, Praha 2007, pp. 786–791.

Soviet Union was ready to wage a war to defend Czechoslovakia. A number of secondary problems emerge that are related to the state of the Red Army and its transfer capacities. Let us examine the Soviet steps and the country's military potential in spring and September 1938. Most authors currently agree that the essential attitude of Moscow in support of Czechoslovakia and its defense as manifested from spring 1938 is already clear. Nevertheless, there are still many question marks in this picture that need due answer so as to unambiguously clarify the problem. However, the outcome of international crises and the actions of players were often far from being unambiguous in many other cases. Explaining these questions would require many archival files, mostly in Russia, to be made available to the public.[42] A number of studies have appeared in recent years that contribute to clarifying the drama of Czechoslovakia's fight for survival in its struggle with the blackmailing Third Reich.[43]

In August 1938 during talks between the commander of Czechoslovak Air Force and Antiaircraft Artillery, General Jaroslav Fajfr, in Moscow the Soviet side offered to deliver

[42] This applies, in particular, to Archiv vnešnej politiki RF, further Archiv ministerstva oborony, Rossijskij gosudarstvennyj vojennyj archiv, Archiv prezidenta RF, and „last but not least" Centralnyj archiv Federalnoj služby bezopasnosti, where documents of Soviet intelligence services are stored, namely fond 3.

[43] To be particularly mentioned: M. Dž. Karlej [Michael Jabara Carley], *Tolko SSSR imejet … čistyje ruki: Sovetskij Sojuz, kollektivnaja bezopasnosť v Jevrope i suďba Čechoslovakii (1934–1938 gody).* In: Novaja i novejšaja istorija, No. 1, 2012, pp. 44–81. Vít Smetana, *Die Tschechoslowakei und ihre Verbündeten in der Krise des September 1938. Wie man sich gegenseitig sah und missverstand.* In: *Die Tschecho-Slowakische Republik nach dem Münchener Abkommen 1938. Neue Fragestellungen und Forschungsmöglichkeiten zur Entwickung im tschechischen Landesteil. Thesen und erste Ergebnisse. Das Münchener Abkommen von 1938 in europäischer Perspektive.* Eds. Jürgen Zarusky, Martin Zückert. Oldenbourg, München, 2013, pp. 411-428.

a total of 700 airplanes to set off the inequality between the Czechoslovak and the German air forces. In this connection, on 28 September, the People's Commissar of Defense Kliment J. Voroshilov sent information to the Politburo, to Josif V. Stalin, the Soviet Government, and Vyacheslav M. Molotov with indication of particular Air Force units in the White Russia, Kiev and Kharkov military regions that were preparing for transfer to Czechoslovakia and were supposed to be transport-ready by 30 September. They included four reinforced regiments of fast bombers and the headquarters of 16th and 10th Air Brigades, in total 246 fast SB bombers and 4 fighter regiments and the headquarters of 58th and 69th Air Brigades with a total of 302 I-16 fighters.[44] In September 1938 the USSR concentrated in military bases in western Ukraine, east of the Polish city of Lvov large land and air forces, including transportation means, heavy combat machines (some 30 infantry divisions, some 600 fighters and bombers) and the adequate logistic means, including fuels and ammunition. However, these troops, except air units, would have needed several weeks to be deployed and ready to support the Czechoslovak Army against Wehrmacht.

Moscow informed about its – particularly first – military steps to some extent the Czechoslovak and French government and military authorities. On 24 September the Chief of French General Staff Maurice Gustave Gamelin informed the Soviet air attaché Nikolai N. Vasilchenko in France that there were 30 (according to some other intelligence sources 38) German divisions deployed along the Czechoslovak-German borders and that Luftwaffe was concentrated around all Czechoslovakia. Next day, N. N. Vasilchenko was ordered by the Commissariat of Defense to personally thank M. G. Gamelin for that infor-

[44] *Dokumenty po istorii mjuchenskogo sgovora 1937–1939 gg.* Moskva 1979, pp. 312-313. Voroshilov fully avoided in his report the essential question of supplies for these regiments from the Soviet Union.

mation and to tell him that the Soviet side had moved toward the western border of the Soviet Union 30 infantry divisions, an unspecified number of cavalry units, that these troops were completed with reservists, and that the Soviet technical units, air force and armored units were in the state of readiness for battle. These as well as other facts and steps were again communicated to the French military attaché in Moscow, Auguste Antoine Palasse, on 28 September.[45]

Potential transit routes of Red Army to Czechoslovakia

Nevertheless, there was one more important factor that the authors of Soviet historical documents do not mention and do not cope with although it was of extreme significance, namely the geographical situation. Czechoslovakia had no common border with the Soviet Union at that time and was separated by Polish and Romanian territory. Should the Red Army come to support Czechoslovakia, it would have to move across the territory of at least one of the above-mentioned countries. The Polish-Soviet relations were rather tense in the whole post-war period and in the late 1930 aggravated so much that the Chief of Red Army General Staff Boris M. Shaposhnikov considered Poland, together with Germany and Italy, the most probable enemy in the European theater of war.[46] Poland systematically

[45] *DMCSSV*. Part III, Praha, Academia 1979, doc. No. 374, pp. 588-589.

[46] Report of the Chief of Red Army General Staff to People's Commissar of Defense K. Y. Voroshilov on probable enemies of the USSR, 24 March 1938. Bohuslav Litera – Jan Wanner, *Přeměny Rudé armády a sovětské strategické plány 1931–1941. Dokumenty a materiály* [Red Army transformations and the Soviet strategic plans 1931-1941. Documents and materials]. In: Slovanské historické studie, Vol. 26, 2000, doc. No. 8, p. 117. On the Soviet-Polish relations С. З. Случ, Польша в политике Советского Союза. [Poland in Policy of the Soviet Union]. In: Советско – Польские отноше-

refused to allow the transit of Soviet troops to the west toward the German border and in September 1938 even wanted to make use of the situation in its favor. The reports on Polish troops concentrating along the Czechoslovak border made the Czechoslovak Minister of Foreign Affairs Kamil Krofta ask Moscow for assistance. Therefore, on 23 September Vladimir P. Potiomkin warned the Polish chargé d´affaires Tadeusz Jankowski that the Polish attack against Czechoslovakia would bring about an annulment of the Polish-Soviet Non-aggression Treaty of 1932. Moscow also announced its attitude with a public government declaration.[47] With the Polish alternative becoming unrealistic, the only alternative that remained was the transfer across Romanian territory, as that country was still Czechoslovakia's ally within the Little Entente. The transit of Soviet troops across Romanian territory had been discussed practically from the signing of the Czechoslovak-Soviet Treaty of Alliance in 1936 on. However, the position of the Romanian Royal government, or the sovereign was questionable. Romania was Czechoslovakia's ally within the Little Entente, but this did not mean that it would share Czechoslovak efforts to conclude an alliance treaty with the USSR. Its statements concerning the Soviet government were not as negative as those of Yugoslavia's representatives, but it did not intend to conclude a similar treaty. The sovereign continued opposing any change in Romania's and Yugoslavia's relation to the USSR. The Court and the

ния в политических условиях Европы 30 годов XX столетия, Moscow, 2001, pp. 156–190.

[47] Declaration and minutes of meeting of Potiomkin and Jankovsky of 23. 9. 1938. In: *DVP*, XXI, doc. No. 366 and 367, pp. 516–517. For Czechoslovak-Polish military relations see Jiří Friedl, *Na jedné frontě. Vztahy československé a polské armády za druhé světové války* [On the same front side. Relations between the Czechoslovak and Polish army in World War II]. ÚSD, Praha 2005, pp. 33–35.

Army Command viewed the Communist International and its activities as a danger to Romania.[48] In spite of that, the Romanian leadership was maneuvering. Early in February 1936, King Carol instructed Foreign Minister Nicolae Titulescu to start examining the possibility of signing a treaty with the USSR on condition that the Soviet Union gave up its claims to Bessarabia.[49] The Romanian government wanted naturally to be sure that in case of Soviet troops entering Romanian territory the units would fully withdraw from that territory after the end of military operations.[50] While in 1936–1938 there were talks between the Soviet officials, particularly Maxim M. Litvinov with Nicolae Titulescu on the possibility of transit for Soviet troops, the Romanian leadership repeatedly announced in mass media that such transit would never be allowed.[51] The question of potential transit of Soviet troops across Romanian territory was naturally also seriously studied by President Beneš, e.g., at the Little Entente sessions, namely at the meeting in Bucharest in June 1936.[52] King Carol allowed N. Titulescu even to discuss in Moscow the possibility of signing a pact with the USSR and to negotiate it. The Soviets manifested their tactics then. Moscow announced at that very moment that it did not see any immediate reasons for concluding an alliance treaty and promptly presented a number of conditions, reproaching the Little Entente members for not mentioning and not pursuing the policy of collective security, although this was certainly not the case

[48] AMZV, Praha, Fond TD 16/13. 01. 1936 from Bucharest.

[49] AMZV, Praha, Representation in Bucharest, 20. 01. 1936.

[50] This question was repeatedly dealt with by People's Commissar Litvinov also in his letters to Alexandrovsky. Alexandrovsky in his position of political representative to Czechoslovakia held the same post in Bucharest in 1938.

[51] *Ciano´s diplomatic papers*, London, 1948, pp. 98–100.

[52] AMZV, Praha, Fond TO/ 340/13. 06. 1936, circular.

of Czechoslovakia. Unfortunately, neither the negotiations in Prague, where King Carol met President Beneš in October 1936, did produce any results in support of Czechoslovakia's defense. However, as the position of Prince Paul and the role of pro-German political circles were increasing, the Romanian policy was shifting toward co-operation with the Third Reich. The Soviet leadership, watching these movements, encouraged the Czechoslovak officials to be more active with respect to the Romanian leadership. This was stressed both by Segey S. Alexandrovsky in talks with Beneš in Prague and by Ivan M. Maisky in his negotiations with Masaryk in London.[53]

The Czechoslovak leadership in its endeavor to create the transport infrastructure needed for the transit of military troops decided to co-fund the construction of a railway line from Czechoslovakia to the Soviet Union via Romania. After long negotiations the best option for the Czechoslovak financial contribution appeared to be the construction of Vişaul – Vatra Dornei railway that was supposed after its completion in 1939/40 to connect Czechoslovakia with the Soviet Union. Czechoslovakia obtained the necessary credit from France. The respective protocol was signed on 14 July 1936, but the construction work was dragging, and at the end of June 1938 the Czechoslovak side provided additional funds for the construction. The idea of railway construction came from the Czechoslovak Army Command wishing to construct a railway that could be used to support Czechoslovakia from the USSR if needed.[54] The construction of a railway line of sufficient capac-

[53] AMZV, Praha, Fond Cabinet, No. 5197, Masaryk to Krofta 28. 11. 1936.

[54] АВП, ф. 010, оп. 11, п. 77, д. 116, л. 45–43. AFP, Fond 010, 0. 11, p. 77, d. 116, fol. 45–43. From an interview of "polpred" Alexandrovsky with Friedman, Head of Foreign Office Economic Department on 31. 08. 1936. Romania was connected to Czechoslovakia at that time by two narrow-gauge railways only that were absolutely unsuitable for the given purpose.

ity required also a new line to be constructed in Ruthenia that would be far enough from the Hungarian border and could not come under fire of Hungarian artillery.[55] In September 1938, however, the railway was far from being completed. Also some roads had to be reconstructed as they were insufficient for the transit of large mechanized military units. However, the possible transit of Soviet troops across Romanian territory was opposed by some Romanian circles, including King Carol, and neither Czechoslovak nor French diplomacy could eliminate that opposition. A change occurred only in summer 1938.[56] Available documents show that neither Moscow nor Bucharest was discussing the transit of Soviet troops at high official level.

Romanian diplomacy tried to avoid unambiguous statements on this matter. Therefore, the information from Reval and Riga coming to Bucharest, according to which an agreement between the Soviet Union and Romania on the transit of Soviet troops was allegedly being prepared, was resolutely denied by the Romanian Foreign Office. This was done upon request by the German chargé d`affaires and Foreign Minister Nicolae Petrescu-Comnen was said to have ensured him that *"such permission could not be granted as the Soviets would not withdraw from Romania anymore."*[57] Of course, the Romanian leadership was aware of the growing problems and was ready to yield to a number of Czechoslovak interests. After Hitler's smear speech on 12 September against Czechoslovakia, Romanian Minister of Interior Armand Călinescu ordered on his own initiative *"to suppress in the Romanian press the worst insults used by Hitler against Mr. President and the Czechoslovak*

[55] Surveying work started also very late, at the turn of 1938.

[56] Miloslav Tejchman, *Československo a Rumunsko v roce 1938 a Malá dohoda* [Czechoslovakia in 1938 and the Little Entente]. In: Slovanské štúdie, Vol. 12, 1971, pp. 97–99.

[57] *Ibid.*

Republic." [58] The Minister himself made a statement during the interview on German propaganda and its danger. *"He assured me then very resolutely that he was a true opponent of the Germans and their policy of dynamism,"*[59] said the Czechoslovak diplomat Miloš Krupka.

As the crisis in Central Europe culminated and under its pressure the Czechoslovak diplomats were acting more assertively. Nevertheless "upon my direct question whether Romania was making military preparations members of the Romanian Government answered either in an evasive or even a negative way." *In spite of that the message reads: " [...] during this week large military units have been transferred to the Romanian-Hungarian and a considerable military concentration has taken place that is undoubtedly aimed against Hungary. The military attaché has sent a message on its size and location to the Ministry of National Defense. Confidential reports that I have received without having time for their verification show that Romania is absolutely determined to start military action against Hungary if that country breaches its neutrality. According to these reports, Romania shares Yugoslavia's position."*[60]

[58] AMZV, Praha, f. Politické zprávy Bukurešť 1938, [f. Representation in Bucharest 1938], report of 13. 09. 1938. Czechoslovak chargé d`affaires M. Krupka was received by the minister in the matter of expulsion of Czechoslovak nationals from Romania and denial of work permit.

[59] *Ibid.*

[60] *Ibid.* In view of these reports on intensive preparations of the Romanian Army for defense of the country it cannot be ignored that less than two weeks later, on 12. 10. 1938 upon King's request Defense Minister General G. Argeşanu and the Ministry's State Secretary General A. Glatz resigned. "According to confidential information the reason was a great disorder caused by the personal regime of General Glatz, who in his position of state secretary with special mission in armament matters decided on all deliveries almost absolutely and independently." AMZV, Praha, Politické zprávy Bukutrešť 1938, [Representation in Bucharest 1938]. Report of 15. 10. 1938, Reg. No. 1035/conf./1938. Secret.

The ministers of foreign affairs, Maxim M. Litvinov and Nicolae Petrescu-Comnen, dined together in Geneva on 20 September. M. M. Litvinov informed his counterpart of the Soviet decision to support Czechoslovakia, as had been decided on by the Politburo of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), but the main topic of their meeting was the Yugoslav attitude to Hungary and the political obstacles to the transit of Soviet troops through Poland, not Romania. Neither did the materials from following days show that the problem would have been discussed on a bilateral basis. Comnen's note of 24 September sent to Litvinov permitting the transit of Soviet troops across Romanian territory and specifying the conditions thereof, which was mentioned in the works of some authors, is most probably a fake.[61] Even if such version had existed, it would have been hardly feasible as the Romanian railway network in the northern part of the country absolutely failed to have sufficient capacity and technical parameters needed for the transit of large masses of troops, fully armed and with all equipment. The main railway lines connected Romania with Hungary and Poland, but none of them went to Slovakia. There was no direct railway line connecting Czechoslovakia with the Soviet Union via Romanian territory. Moreover, all troops and equipment would have to be reloaded from the Soviet track gauge of 1 524 mm to Romanian trains with the European gauge of 1 435 mm, while no such technical

[61] For details see Milan Hauner, *Zrada, sovětizace, nebo historický lapsus? Ke kritice dvou dokumentů k československo – sovětským vztahům z roku 1938* [Betrayal, Sovietization, or a historical lapsus? On the criticism of two documents of Czechoslovak-Soviet relations in 1938]. In: Soudobé dějiny, Vol. VI., No. 4, 1999, pp. 545–571. I was unable to find it in spite of thorough research. My research work in Romanian archives has not been completed yet.

facility of this type was available at the only Romanian-Soviet railway crossing Tiraspol – Bendery.[62]

It appears, however, that Moscow was not taking the transit across Romanian territory seriously, but was only considering the Polish corridor option. Any resolute step in this matter, however, would mean a danger of Soviet-Polish conflict that might have absolutely unforeseeable consequences for Moscow. Under the existing international conditions the USSR would most probably be considered and designated as aggressor and would have to face a potential coalition of hostile countries, which was an alternative that Josif V. Stalin always carefully avoided.[63] Ultimately, however, the transit across Romania depended on the political interests of Romanian ruling circles. In spring 1938, Romania started a complex diplomatic game in which it increasingly supported the Czechoslovak side and its integrity, which was in line with the Romanian interests. It responded primarily to the Hungarian revisionist claims, and a resolution of the League of Nations designating Czechoslovakia as a victim would make it possible for Romania to finally change its position and allow the transit of Red Army troops and provide assistance to Czechoslovakia.[64]

Indirect evidence of the shift in Romania's position was its generous attitude to the Soviet airplanes flying to Czechoslovakia. In spring 1938 it allowed, in spite of the strong protests of Poland, the transit of 20 and in summer of additional 40 SB-2

[62] *Ibid*, p. 567.

[63] Hugh Ragsdale, *The Munich Crisis and the Issue of Red Army Transit Across Romania*. In: Russian Review, Vol. 57, No. 4, 1998, s. 614–617. Same, *Soviet Military Preparations and policy in the Munich Crisis: New Evidence.* In: Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas, Vol. 47, No. 2, 1999, pp. 210–226.

[64] M. Tejchman, *Československo a Rumunsko* [Czechoslovakia and Romania], p. 98.

bombers purchased by Czechoslovakia in the Soviet Union.[65] Bucharest was probably ready to tolerate also other flights of Soviet military planes, which would, as assured by the Romanian side, produce formal protests at the most. Anyway, the Romanian anti-aircraft defense was so weak that it could not efficiently prevent such flights.[66]

Assessment of the Soviet procedure

When reviewing the steps taken by the Soviet Union during the crisis of September 1938 and its attitude to Czechoslovakia it appears that the Soviet Union acted with much prudence and caution. Moscow declared its support for Czechoslovakia and its readiness to provide its military and other assistance; nevertheless, only on condition that the 1935 treaty of alliance was fully implemented and that Czechoslovakia was first supported by France. The policy of Paris, which was the worst scenario for Czechoslovakia, relieved Moscow from all its commitments. Although large military measures had been prepared, in view of the attitude of Poland and Romania they became unfeasible and the Soviet Union failed to take any real steps to carry out the transit of its troops. Actually, there was no reason to do so. The diplomatic situation was developing in a way that practically prevented any such action. It is obvious that J. V. Stalin acted so as to avoid the involvement of the Soviet Union in a unilateral war although he was, like in the case of Spain or China, interested in stopping the aggressor. Thus, it appears that he was ready to join Great Britain, France

[65] It was a fast bomber (skorostnyj bombardirovščik), Soviet code SB-2, Czechoslovak code SB-71, with capacity of 600 kg bombs, belonging to the light bomber category.

[66] M. Tejchman, *Ibid.*, pp. 100, 106.

and their allies in a collective action, and even in a war against Germany, which he had long regarded as a potential enemy. He made also every effort to make it possible for the Soviet Union to participate in international negotiations about the European crisis, which is what neither Britain nor France was wishing. Anyway, the signing of the Four-Power Pact was certainly no evidence of the will to allow the USSR to participate in negotiations and co-decide on European problems, except for the League of Nations. The large-scale mobilization plans were undoubtedly meant seriously as a preparation of such collective action. The great maneuvers near the western border were also meant as a warning to Poland. The problem of making the Polish government allow the transit of Soviet troops across the Polish territory was supposed to be solved by the western countries, like in August 1939.

Some Remarks on a Controversial Subject. Romania and the Issue of the Soviet Troops Transit on Their Way to Czechoslovakia in 1938

Adrian Viţălaru

Historiographical disputes and interpretation patterns

The international crisis – called the "Sudeten crisis" or „Czechoslovakian crisis" – set off in 1938 Europe, resolved following the Munich Conference (September 29-30), has represented and is still representing a challenge for historians. They are trying to explain, among other things, how the solution was reached of constraining Czechoslovakia to surrender certain of her territories, hence forcing a state which could rely on an alliance system, though having enough problems at and within their own borders (Little Entente), which comprised two great European powers – France and the Soviet Union. According to the treaties concluded in 1935, if Czechoslovakia was to become the mark for an aggression from the German Reich, then France was supposed to step in to support her ally. One of the conditions for the Red Army to be part in the war was the involvement of Paris in the conflict, next to the French and Czechoslovaks[1]. Only that – in case of an armed engagement, the Soviet troops were forced, on their way towards

[1] Igor Lukes, *Czechoslovakia Between Stalin and Hitler: The Diplomacy of Edvard Beneš in the Thirties*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 46-58.

the Czechoslovak territory, to pass either through Poland, or through Romania. The Poles had a roads and railway system better than had their southern ally – Romania, but the „Polish alternative" was not viable because of the adamant opposition of the leaders in Warsaw. The Poles and the Czechoslovaks had a feud over the Teschen region, fact which made Poland to shun the transit of Soviet help meant for Czechoslovakia through her territory. Consequently, the „Romanian alternative" seemed to be the „key" for granting Soviet military assistance to the Czechoslovak ally, without the Red Army assaulting any frontiers.

Although, after Titulescu had been dismissed from the Sturdza Palace, the Romanians avoided speaking clearly on this subject matter, there were, nevertheless, favourable conditions, particularly from the standpoint of the close relations between Bucharest and Prague. The Romanians were interested in the situation in Czechoslovakia because this was one of the main pieces of the alliance system of Bucharest (they were members of the Little Entente) which played an important role in the armament programme of the Romanian army, under the circumstances that the contracts with France had not been fulfilled to the extent expected by the Romanians. Therefore, maintaining the independence of Czechoslovakia and her viability as a state was of importance in view of preserving the security of the Romanian state[2]. Nevertheless, Romania could have been drawn into a war supporting Czechoslovakia only if this state was attacked by Hungary, but not in case of a German assault. Given these circumstances, the Romanians should have found the proper ways to persuade Budapest to stay out of a conflict involving the Czechoslovak state, if they were not willing to take such a decision.

[2] Dov B. Lungu, *Romania and the Great Powers, 1933-1940*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 1989, p. 126.

But, as a matter of fact, Romania's situation was much more complicated in the potential case of the outbreak of war in Europe, involving Germany, Czechoslovakia and her allies. Should the tensions between Czechoslovakia and Germany reach alarming levels (in May 1938), the authorities in Bucharest were subjected to constant pressure so that they would choose a clear position in the matter of granting to the Red Army troops the transit right across the Romanian national territory. The actors involved in the „Czechoslovakian crisis" were interested to see the response of the Romanians.

Were they willing to grant the transit right to the Soviet troops on their way to Czechoslovakia? Under what conditions would Romania have accepted to take such a decision, as it was known that it was mainly the territorial dispute centred around Bessarabia that had poisoned the relations between Bucharest, and would the Romanians fulfil their obligations stipulated in the treaties or would they be willing to accept new obligations depending on circumstances? Would they be ready to go to war against Germany next to the two great powers allied with Czechoslovakia, when the German pressure on Danubian Europe had become more and more obvious after the *Anschluß*? How could be read the information which appeared in the diplomatic milieus and in the international press with regard to the transit through the Romanian airspace of the Soviet planes under way to Czechoslovakia?

These are some of the questions taken up, later on, by the historians as well. The question marks regarding Romania's position in the period of the Czechoslovakian crisis stirred the interest of both Romanian and foreign historians. The case of Romania is being studied in close connection with – in fact it represents a component part of – the analysis of the strategy applied by the Soviet Union with regard to her Czechoslovak ally in 1938. On this background, understanding the position

of Romania is a component of the dispute between the claims that the Soviets were willing to fight in 1938, on the one hand and, on the other hand, the opinion that Stalin was interested in the outbreak of an armed conflict in Europe, with no participation of the Red Army[3].

Far from wanting to launch a criticism of the historiography concerning Romania's attitude with regard to the issue of the transit of Soviet troops under way to Czechoslovakia in 1938, since such an undertaking would require a more comprehensive independent study, we have chosen nonetheless to present a number of opinions, in order to show the disputes arisen on this subject matter[4]. Also, we have considered that presenting several opinions – sometimes contradictory ones, circulating in both the Romanian and the foreign historiography, is a necessary undertaking in order to outline more clearly the purposes of our research.

The Romanian historiography of the 1950s, tributary to the Soviet analysis patterns, emphasized the fact that the leaders in Bucharest opposed the wish of the Soviet Union to offer

[3] See a discussion on this subject, from the view of the debates referring to the role of Russia in the origins of the Second World War (Teddy J. Uldricks, *Debating the role of Russia in the origins of the Second World War*, in *The Origins of the Second World War Reconsidered*, Second Edition, *A.J.P. Taylor and the Historians*, Edited by Gordon Martel, London and New York, Routledge, 1999, p. 135-154). See also the specifications added by Hugh Ragsdale regarding the historiography and the sources used in researching this theme (Hugh Ragsdale, *The Soviets, the Munich Crisis, and the Coming of World War II*, Cambridge, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. XIX-XXII).

[4] For a summary of the main historiographical approaches regarding the question of the Soviet troops transit through the territory of Romania, see the study of Larry L. Watts, *Romania as Military Ally (I): Czechoslovakia in 1938*, in „Romanian Civilization", volume VII, No. 2, Fall, 1998, pp. 21-22.

military assistance to Czechoslovakia[5]. Later on, in the 1960s, in the general framework of Romania politically moving away from the Soviet Union and choosing the line of national-communism, some studies and surveys began to be published, too, shedding light on more facets of Romania's position, pointing out the fact that the leaders in Bucharest tried to offer political and even military assistance to their Czechoslovak ally, by implicitly allowing the cross-country flight of Soviet airplanes bound for Czechoslovakia over Romanian territory[6].

The studies prepared by Eliza Campus[7] and Viorica Moisuc[8], as well as the papers signed by Ioan Talpeş[9], Gheorghe Zaharia and Constantin Botoran[10], based on the analysis of an

[5] See, for example, J. Benditer, *Attitude of the Romanian government to Czechoslovakia in the months preceding Munich (May-September 1938)*, in „Studies and history material", 9, no. 5, pp. 7-20.

[6] For an inventory of the most important Romanian contributions to this subject, in the 1960s and in the early 1970s see, for example, Viorica Moisuc, Gheorghe Matei, *Romania's foreign policy in the times of Munich (March 1938 – March 1939)*, in *Issues of Romania's foreign policy 1919-1939. Collection of studies*, edition supervisor: Viorica Moisuc, Editura Militară, Bucharest, 1971, pp. 302-303, note 4.

[7] Eliza Campus, *Romania's foreign policy in the time between the two world wars*, extract from the collection „Studies and history materials", Vol. X, Bucharest, 1967, pp. 25-30 (143-148); Eadem, *Little Entente*, Editura Științifică, Bucharest, 1968, pp. 295-326.

[8] Among the great number of studies published by Viorica Moisuc with regard to Romania's foreign policy in 1938, let us mention here the paper *Romania's diplomacy and the question of defending the sovereignty and national independence in March 1938 – May 1940*, Editura Academiei RSR, Bucharest, 1971, pp. 45-75.

[9] Ioan Talpeș, *New data concerning Romania's position in the circumstances of the international contradictions in the summer of 1938*, in the „History Magazine", no. 28, 1975, pp. 1649-1670.

[10] Gheorghe Zaharia, Constantin Botoran, *Romania's national defense policy in the inter-war European circumstances 1919-1939*, Editura Militară, Bucharest, 1981, pp. 192-195; 266-273.

extensive fond of documents in the Romanian diplomatic and military archives, were a step forward in understanding Romania's attitude in the diplomatic, but particularly in the military area, during the time of the Czechoslovakian crisis.

After 1989, the Romanian historians broached this subject matter tangentially. The prevailing opinion is that Romania allowed the cross-country flight over the Romanian territory for the planes bought by the Czechoslovaks from the Soviets, despite all pressure made by Poles and Germans. This fact is read as an example for the loyalty shown by the Romanian leaders to their Czechoslovak ally[11]. At the same time, in a summary devoted to the history of Romania the fact is pointed out that: „Neither Carol, nor other Romanian leaders took seriously into consideration the possibility to join forces with the Soviet Union"[12].

Despite the interest shown by the foreign historiography to the Czechoslovakian crisis, the issue of Romania's decision on the transit of the Soviet troops through her territory represented, as noted by Geoffrey Roberts, „one of the most obscure episodes of the Munich crisis, one that generally had been ignored by historians"[13]. Nonetheless, even several years after

[11] Florin Constantiniu, *A sincere history of the Romanian people*, Univers Enciclopedic, Bucharest, 1997, pp. 360-361.

[12] This judgement belongs to Keith Hitchins (Mihai Bărbulescu, Dennis Deletant, Keith Hitchins, Şerban Papacostea, Pompiliu Teodor, *History of Romania*, Editura Enciclopedică, Bucharest, 1998, p. 447). See also Keith Hitchins, *Romania 1866-1947*, Edition IV, translated from English by George G. Potra and Delia Razdolescu, Humanitas, Bucharest, 2013, p. 510.

[13] Geoffrey Roberts, *The Soviet Union and the Origins of the Second World War: Russo-German Relations and the Road to War, 1933-1941*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1995, p. 58. G. Roberts was referring especially to the fact that may have been willing to allow the passage of the Red Army, in September 1938, if the League of Nations had judged, even with a majority of her members, that Czechoslovakia was a victim of aggression. Besides,

Munich, some historians stated that fear of the Soviet Union, the issue of Bessarabia and Poland's interventions resulted in Romania denying the Soviet troops the right to transit the Romanian territory[14]. A little later, other historians, relying on new sources, tried to demonstrate that, despite the above specified details, Romania permitted the transit of some Soviet planes and moreover offered road access to the Soviets who, in turn, did not intend to support Czechoslovakia[15]. A similar interpretation was given by scientists such as Igor Lukes, who considered that the Soviets had played a double game in 1938, when, in fact, the leader in the Kremlin was not interested in the offers made by the Romanians to allow a transit corridor for the Soviet troops passage to Czechoslovakia[16], as his goal was rather to ignite a European war, with no involvement of the Red Army, as sustained by Robert C. Tucker[17] and R. C. Raack[18].

Very important for the understanding of the relations between Romania, Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union, having as a starting point the matter of the military obligations of Bucharest to Prague in her position as a military ally, is

Roberts is a supporter of the idea that the Soviets were ready for a military intervention in favour of Czechoslovakia (*Ibidem*, p. 57).

[14] David Dallin, *Soviet Russia's Foreign Policy: 1939-1942*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1942, pp. 19-20; Max Beloff, *The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia: 1929-1941*, volume 2, 1936-1941, London, Oxford University Press, 1949, pp. 131-161.

[15] Jiri Hochman, *The Soviet Union and the Failure of Collective Security: 1934-1938*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1984, pp. 74-77, 149, 164 și 194-201.

[16] See, for instance, Igor Lukes, *Stalin and Czechoslovakia in 1938. An Autopsy of a Myth*, in Vol. *The Münich Crisis, 1938: Prelude to World War II*, ed. by. I. Lukes and E. Goldstein, London, Frank Cass, 1999, pp. 13-47.

[17] Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin in Power: The Revolution from Above, 1928–1941*, New York, London, Norton, 1992, pp. 522-523.

[18] R.C. Raack, *Stalin's Drive to the West, 1938-1945: The Origins of the Cold War*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1995, pp. 19-20.

the research signed by Larry L. Watts. Watts' study, which in many respects followed the line of argument contained in the contributions of I. Talpeș, introduced in the academic circuit relevant pieces of information, coming from the Military Archives of Romania, about the cross-country flight of the Soviet planes headed towards Czechoslovakia and about the way the high ranking Romanian officers were seeing the Soviet Union in the period of the Czechoslovakian crisis[19]. From the Romanian military documents investigated by Larry L. Watts it appears that the transit of the Soviet planes towards Czechoslovakia through the Romanian airspace was allowed and protected by the Romanian military and political authorities. Moreover, Watts emphasizes the fact that, although the Romanians would have wanted a *de jure* recognition of the fact that some territories that could be crossed by the Soviet troops (Bessarabia) belonged to Romania, the military leaders did not consider this as a precondition, as long as Moscow seemed to recognize the *status-quo* and to fall in line against revisionism. As a matter of fact, the American historian disapproved the manner the western historiography described Romania as an ally of Czechoslovakia in 1938. Watts claims that Romania was interested to keep her commitments to Czechoslovakia, even in the difficult political and military circumstances in the fall of 1938[20]. Additionally, he pleads that the Romanians' fear of the Soviets was not as great as to prevent the Romanian-Soviet cooperation for supporting Czechoslovakia[21].

Hugh Ragsdale interfered also in the debate on the attitude of the Soviet Union to Czechoslovakia in 1938 and, implicitly,

[19] But Watts does not broach also the issue of the document of September 24, 1938, which showed Romania's intent to allow Soviet troops to cross her territory.

[20] Larry L. Watts, *op. cit.*, pp. 52-54.

[21] *Ibidem*, p. 41.

on Romania's position as to the potential military assistance offered by the Soviets to Czechoslovakia. Based on diplomatic and military sources from the states directly engaged in resolving the Czechoslovakian crisis, Ragsdale noticed that Romania allowed the crossing of her airspace and accepted that the Soviet planes flying to Czechoslovakia landed in Romania, should they encounter technical difficulties. In his opinion, the attitude of the Romanian leaders with regard to the transit of the Soviet troops through Romania was not as adamant as they seemed to show on formal level[22].

A different reading than the traditional explanations of the Romanian historians, and also than the opinions of Larry L. Watts and, to a certain extent, of H. Ragsdale, is represented by authors such as Dov. B. Lungu[23] and Rebbeca Heynes. For instance, R. Heynes considers that: „Actually, the 1938 Czechoslovakian crisis was characterized by Romania's desperate attempt to avoid fulfilling her obligations as per the treaty with Czechoslovakia, in order to prevent being dragged into war against Germany. At the same time, the Romanian government did its best to deny the Red Army the right to cross Romania in order to help the Czechoslovak allies. The Romanians were afraid that the Red Army entering Romanian territory could push Romania onto the scene of the war between Germany and the Soviet Union, fact which would have resulted in a lasting occupation of Bessarabia by the Soviets"[24].

[22] Hugh Ragsdale, *The Munich Crisis and the Issue of Red Army Transit across Romania*, in „Russian Review", Vol. 57, No. 4 (Oct., 1998), pp. 614-617; Idem, *The Soviets, the Munich Crisis, and the Coming of World War II*, Cambridge, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2004, *passim*.

[23] Dov B. Lungu, *op. cit.*, pp. 126-135.

[24] Rebecca Haynes, *Romanian Politicy towards Germany between 1936 and 1940*, Polirom, Iași, 2003, p. 57.

The resolution of the puzzle concerning Romania's attitude toward the Soviet military assistance for Czechoslovakia was complicated even more by a new component arisen in 1984. This was a document signed by the Romanian foreign affairs minister and addressed to his Soviet opposite number, M. Litvinov. Dated September 24, 1938, the document is a top secret notice from the Romanian government granting the right of passage for the Soviet troops on land roads, after the moment the German might have attacked Czechoslovakia, and the right to fly though Romania's airspace for the Soviet air force even prior to the outbreak of the war[25]. This document has been included in the arguments of those who are claiming that the Soviets were not willing to step in for the benefit of Czechoslovakia. At the same time, some historians are questioning the reliability of this paper, which changes the view on understanding the attitude of Romania towards the transit of the Soviet troops through Romanian territory during the Czechoslovakian crisis[26].

Consequently, starting from the opinions presented in historiography, we shall try to observe how the Romanian authorities analyzed the subject matter of the passage of the Soviet troops during the Czechoslovakian crisis. We shall attempt to see to what extent the leaders in Bucharest included new elements in their statements relating to the passage of the Soviet

[25] See Jiri Hochman, *op. cit.*, pp. 194-201 (appendix C – *Text of a Note of the Romanian Government to the Government of the Soviet Union, September 24, 1938*). The document was published in 2010 also by Viorica Moisuc. The author does not enlighten us where she has got this document and she does not mention that the text of the note was published, years before, by J. Hochman (Viorica Moisuc, *Romania and the Czechoslovakian crisis. Documents. September 1938*, Adevărul Holding, Bucharest, 2010, doc. no. 325, pp. 591-597).

[26] See Hugh Ragsdale, *The Munich Crisis...*, pp. 614-617; Idem, *The Soviets...*, pp. 149-151.

troops on Romanian territory in the time of March-September 1938 and which were the crucial factors in the decision taking in this case. Also, we shall insist on the document dated September 24, 1938, which contains the approval given by Romania for the passage of the Red Army, in an attempt to analyze to what extent the doubts regarding its authenticity, expressed by Hugh Ragsdale, are justified or not. Finally, the basic question we are trying to find an answer to is: to what extent were the Romanian leaders willing to allow the access of Soviet troops on their territory if Czechoslovakia happened to be victim of an aggression of Germany?

Romania, the great powers and the issue of the Soviet military assistance for Czechoslovakia in the spring of 1938

The question referring to Romania's position to the passage of the Soviet troops under way to Czechoslovakia became more and more frequently the subject of debates in the diplomatic milieus and in the European press after the *Anschluß*. Germany's advancing towards Central Europe made the officials in Prague consider that the danger lurking over Czechoslovakia had increased significantly, even up to the dawning of a layout where the Czechoslovak state could have been the next target of the Third Reich[27]. Consequently, they tried to obtain from their own allies the assurance that the treaties would be observed in case of a potential military conflict involving

[27] *Foreign Relations of United States Diplomatic Papers,* volume 1, *1938*, *General,*Washington, United States Gouvernement Printing Office, 1955,. The Chargé in France (Wislon) to the Secretary of State, Paris, March 14 , 1938, p. 483; see also *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939* (further on – D.B.F.P.), Edited by E.L. Woodward and Rohan Butler, Third Series, volume I, 1938, London, His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1949, doc. no. 61, 63, 81, pp. 33-34, 36-37, 50.

Czechoslovakia. Under these circumstances, the diplomats began sounding out again the versions of describing Romania's position towards the possible passage of the Soviet troops through Romanian territory, in case the French-Soviet and Czechoslovak-Soviet pacts were activated, following a German aggression against Czechoslovakia.

When, several days after the *Anschluß*, the French asked whether Romania would allow the Red Army free passage to help the Czechoslovaks, the Romanian officials suggested that they did not agree with such an alternative[28]. Besides, at the end of March, by the voice of A. Thierry, the French government expressed their interest in learning Romania's possible reaction if, in absence of any previous agreement, she was to receive the request to facilitate the Soviet assistance for Czechoslovakia. The reply given by Gheorghe Tătărescu is very important for the understanding of the attitude displayed by the Romanian decision makers on this subject matter. On the last day of his office, the minister of foreign affairs *ad-interim* of Romania stated that in case of a German attack against Czechoslovakia, Romania would not move in. On the contrary, if France decided to step in to help the Czechoslovak state, and this meant the outbreak of a conflict in Europe, the Romanian state could not stay isolated. However, Romania's intervention depended on the response of Poland, and the consent for the passage of the Soviet troops towards Czechoslovakia was discussed only as a „last option" (dernière extrémité)[29]. The Romanian minister justified the position of Bucharest in the matter of the passage of the Soviet troops by reverting to the common

[28] Dov. B. Lungu, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

[29] Centre des Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes (further on – C.A.D.N.), Fond Bucarest – Legation, carton 220, Cable no. 349-353, Thierry, Bucharest, March 30, 1938.

Romanian-Russian/Soviet history and to the fact that the Romanian public opinion would see the passage of the Bolshevik troops as „the greatest calamity" which could befall the Romanians[30]. However, in case of referral to the obligations specified by paragraph 3 of article 16 of the Covenant of the League of Nations, Romania might, in the end, give a positive reply to an ultimatum launched by the Soviets, so as not to risk coming in conflict with France and Czechoslovakia[31]. Therefore, the leaders in Bucharest were rather inclined to adopt a wait-and-see attitude, watching attentively the international arena, in an attempt to read correctly the reactions of the great powers. The assumption of accepting the passage of Soviet troops was taken into consideration, but only as a last resort option, with no official commitment undertaken by the Romanian government in this respect.

In late March, early April, the international press was featuring contradictory items of information referring to Romania's attitude with regard to the passage of Soviet troops en route to Czechoslovakia. On the one hand there were newspapers that wrote about Romania's refusal to allow the Soviet troops to cross Romanian territory in case of a German attack against Czechoslovakia[32], whilst other publications offered news about a potential Czech-Romanian-Soviet military cooperation[33] and saw the friendly cable exchange between the new Romanian minister of foreign affairs, Nicolae Petrescu-Comnen, and Maksim Litvinov as a sign of change of political direction in Romania[34].

[30] *Ibidem*.

[31] *Ibidem*.

[32] Central Historical National Archives – (further on – A.N.I.C.), Fond Ministry of National Propaganda. Foreign press, file 970, f. 345.

[33] *Ibidem*, file 1009, f. 30.

[34] Idem, Fond Ministry of National Propaganda. Agencies, file 30, f. 18.

During the very same period, the Soviet minister in Prague travelled to Bucharest, with the mission to scrutinize Romania's foreign policy and to notice how the leaders in Bucharest felt about the matter of the Soviet troops crossing the territory of Romania. Pursuant to his visit, Aleksandrovsky found that the Romanian state did not want to undertake any additional new international commitments, although the Romanian minster of foreign affairs advised him to report to Litvinov that there were no contradictions between Romania and the Soviet Union with regard to the goals of foreign policy[35]. Nonetheless, the Romanian officials were suggesting in the circles of diplomats accredited in Bucharest that the talks with Aleksandrovsky were kept on a general level, because the Romanians felt still annoyed by the attitude of the Soviets in the Butenko case. For instance, Gheorghe Tătărescu was specifying to the minister of France in Bucharest that, for that time, the Romanians were not willing to negotiate „face to face" with the Soviets a mutual assistance agreement, but they were not rejecting the possibility that Romania might find a way to reach an understanding with the Soviets within a general agreement[36].

The government in Prague considered the exchange of polite messages between the Romanian and Soviet foreign affairs ministers as a positive fact, the same as Alexsandrovsky's visit in Bucharest[37]. However, Czechoslovakia was directly interested that Romania and the Soviet Union should overlook the

[35] Dov. B. Lungu, *op. cit.*, p. 127. See also I. Talpeş, *New data concerning...*, p. 1656, note 14; Idem, *Diplomacy and defense. Coordinates of Romanian foreign policy*, 1933-1939, p. 213, note 3; Hugh Ragsdale, *The Soviets...*, p. 78.

[36] C.A.D.N., Fond Bucarest – Legation, carton 220, Cable no. 349-353, Thierry, Bucharest, March 30, 1938.

[37] See details in Jonathan Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security in Europe, 1933-1939*, London, The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1984, p. 170.

negative effects caused by the „Butenko affair"[38], in order to find a solution in the sensible issue of the Soviet military assistance for the Czechoslovak state. They were optimistic with regard to the possibility of the Soviets and the Romanians reaching an agreement. However, the Czechoslovak foreign affairs minister declared, on April 10, 1938, to the French minister in Prague, that the Soviet Union was ready to keep her commitments towards Czechoslovakia, with our without the consent of Romania[39]. At that moment, the French did not agree with the alternative of the Red Army passing through the territory of Romania with no consent from the authorities in Bucharest. They considered that obtaining Romania's agreement was needed not only to avoid a Romanian-Soviet armed conflict, but also to avoid in any case the coming into action of the Romanian-Polish alliance, thus making Poland cross over into the camp of the opponents of Czechoslovakia[40]. The French were encouraging the Czechoslovaks to keep on talking with the authorities in Moscow about the way to reach an understanding with Romania with regard to the military assistance they could benefit of from the Soviet Union[41].

The King, the new government in Bucharest, inaugurated on March 30, 1938, and their Foreign Affairs Minister chose to act, in certain respects, in a similar way as reported by Tătărescu to Thierry. When keeping their distance from the alternative

[38] On this subject see: Hugh Ragsdale, *The Butenko Affairs: Documents from Soviets-Romanian Relations in the Time of the Purges, Anschluss, and Munich*, in „The Slavonic and East European Review", Vol. 79, No. 4 (Oct., 2001), pp. 698-720.

[39] *Documents diplomatiques français (1932-1939)* (further on – D.D.F.), deuxième série, 1936-1939, tome IX, Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, doc. no. 154, pp. 318-319.

[40] *Ibidem*, p. 319.

[41] *Ibidem*.

of the passage of the Red Army towards Czechoslovakia, the Romanians were considering several factors, among them: the attitude of France and Great Britain; the position of Poland; the analysis of the Soviet factor; the recommendations offered by the General Staff of the Romanian Army; the way the Romanian society would answer when facing such a challenge and, last but not least, the response of Hungary and the attitude of Germany. As mentioned by Aleksandrovsky, in his meeting with Stalin and other Soviet leaders after his visit in Bucharest, the King of Romania was apprehensive of Germany's reaction, which made him unwilling, at that time, to conclude an agreement referring to the passage of the Soviet troops[42].

At the same time, in April 1938, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania was investigating with assiduity Romania's military obligations to her allies. The representatives of the Romanian foreign affairs ministry asked the Higher General Staff to send them copies of several military agreements and treaties concluded by Romania with Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Poland[43], which fact proved that such documents were not available also in the archives of the Foreign Affairs Ministry. The documents served for preparing a study about the *Military commitments between the states of the Little Entente*, set up in April 1938 by the legation attaché N. Timiraş. The undertaking of Timiraş represented, in fact, a continuation and an expansion of the work done one year before by his colleague, Alexandru Cretzianu, who had just written a report with the purpose to give an answer to the question: Can we allow, in one form or another, the passage right for the Russian troops?[44]

[42] *Ibidem*, doc. n. 129.

[43] Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania (further on – A.M.A.E.), Fond Little Entente, Vol. 50, f. 304-305.

[44] Hugh Ragsdale, *The Soviets...*, p. 66; Dov B. Lungu, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

The document signed by Timiraș comprises the specification that „in case Czechoslovakia were in a conflict with Germany and Romania remained neutral, we would be forced to grant for the transport of any means of war coming from the USSR and meant for Czechoslovakia."[45] Under these conditions it was important to specify what was meant by the wording „means of war", since – as stated by the author of the study – „Czechoslovakia could claim at a certain time that by means of war there were meant also troops, transported either by land or by air"[46]. According to this reading, Romania was obliged to practice friendly neutrality in case of a Czechoslovakian-German conflict, and this didn't mean anything more than a reinforcement of the provisions of art. 16, paragraph 3 of the Covenant of the League of Nations. Thus, Czechoslovakia might choose to object if the Romanian state opposed „a massive Soviet cross-country flight" or it was also possible that Poland asked Romania to take measures, since the cross-country flight of the Soviet planes could be sensed as a serious threat to the security of the two states[47]. Right then, tells us Timiraș, there was no technical agreement giving the definition of the concept „means of war", but the Romanian diplomat considered that „this expression means solely the conveyance of arms, ammunition and raw materials"[48]. The conclusion of the study prepared by Timiraș is quite meaningful for understanding the concerns of the Bucharest diplomacy of that period and of Romania's position face to the situation in Czechoslovakia over the following months: „Therefore, to sum up, the Military Convention of the Little Entente, based on political

[45] A.M.A.E., Fond Little Entente, Vol. 50, f. 318.
[46] *Ibidem*.
[47] *Ibidem*.
[48] *Ibidem*, f. 319.

alliance treaties, contains commitments of immediate assistance of defensive character towards Hungary either alone or allied with other states, obligations regarding concentration in view of certain military measures, but without pushing on up to the state of war, except the assumption of mutually agreed „casus belli" – as well as transit obligations, whose extent or strict execution could risk to compromise the potentially neutral position of Romania in a worldwide conflagration"[49].

The above described facts give proof of the concerns of the Romanian diplomacy, since before the build-up of the internal crisis in Czechoslovakia, for defining the political behaviour of Bucharest, in accordance with the alliances Romania was a party to. Following the conducted analyses, the Romanians could understand the fact that their attitude with regard to the Soviet military assistance granted to Czechoslovakia was entwined with the manner of the Polish approach to this subject matter. But, as already specified, Poland expressed in the clearest terms possible, ever since the spring 1938, her opposition to the transit over her territory of a potential Soviet support offered to Czechoslovakia[50]. The Romanians used Poland's steadfast attitude to dodge when they were asked questions on the subject of the Soviet military assistance to Prague. They adopted the politically substantiated strategy to say nothing before consulting with their allies. Actually, this type of reaction concealed the precautions taken by the Romanian leaders when the discussion turned to the subject of the Soviet troops transiting through Romanian territory.

[49] *Ibidem*, f. 321.

[50] Anthony Tihamer Komjathy, *The Crises of France's East Central European Diplomacy 1933-1938*, New York, East European Quarterly, Boulder, 1977, pp. 208-209. Williamson Murray, *The Change in the European Balance of Power, 1938-1939. The Path to Ruin*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1984, pp. 235-237.

The Romanian diplomacy and the issue of the passage of the Soviet troops (May-September 1938)

The subject of Romania's attitude regarding the Soviet military assistance to their Czechoslovak ally was also broached by the foreign affairs ministers present at the gathering of the Council of the League of Nations in May 1938. If, at their meeting on May 9, Litvinov and Petrescu-Comnen[51] avoided to touch the subject of the Soviet troops passage through Romanian territory, in the conversation of the French and Romanian foreign affairs ministers this issue was not eluded any more[52]. To Bonnet's question referring to the readiness of the Romanians to grant the Soviet planes the right of passage in case Moscow should want to supply help to Czechoslovakia, the Romanian foreign affairs minister replied that the Romanians harboured not quite pleasant memories on the army of their neighbour state, and that such a decision should be taken after consulting her allies. Or, estimated the Romanian minister, the Romanian-Polish treaty would be denounced, and Romania could be turned into a battle field[53]. Comnen insisted to point out that in such a situation, „without France which was pushed aside from offering us her valuable backing", Romania risked to lose also the support of the allies she could cooperate directly with[54].

[51] *Romanian-Soviet Relations. Documents*, Vol. II, 1935-1941, volume supervisor: Costin Ionescu, authors: Vitalie Văratic, Dumitru Preda, Stelian Obiziuc, Editura Fundației Culturale Române, Bucharest, 2003, doc. no. 85, pp. 188-189.

[52] N. P. Comnène, *Preludi del grande dramma. Ricordi documenti di un diplomatico*, Roma, Edizioni Leonardo, 1947, pp. 34-36). The document where Petrescu-Comnen tells about his meeting with Bonnet is dated May 12, and was dispatched to Bucharest three days after the meeting with Bonnet (A.M.A.E., Fond 71/Switzerland, Vol. 6, Cable no. 5, May, 12, 1938, Geneva, Comnen to Foreign Affairs, for His Majesty the King, f. 130-133).

[53] *Ibidem*, f. 132.

[54] *Ibidem*, f. 133.

In the note drawn up by Bonnet following the meeting with the Romanian foreign affairs minister, however, a different element appears as to the report forwarded by Comnen to King Carol II. The leader at Quai d'Orsay was speaking about the fact that the Romanian diplomat had told him that Romania would oppose the passage of the Soviet troops on her territory, even if Moscow might be willing to extend assurances with respect to Bessarabia[55]. Although it is difficult for us to identify which of the two ministers left out or added later certain new data on the meeting of May 12, the arising conclusion is that the Romanian leaders felt not induced to undertake new obligations towards their Czechoslovak ally, and that they were not willing, for the moment, to allow the Red Army crossing their national territory. Consequently, even if the Romanian foreign affairs minister avoided giving an official answer, we consider that his declarations – „on his own behalf" – reflected, actually, the political options held at that moment by King Carol II and the government in Bucharest.

In May 1938, because of the increasing tenseness between the Sudeten Germans and the Authorities in Prague, as well as in the relations between Germany and Czechoslovakia, the subject of the outbreak of an armed conflict in Europe came to be most seriously investigated in Bucharest. These concerns are mirrored both in the diary of King Carol II, and in the notations of Armand Călinescu, the then internal affairs minister in the Miron Cristea government and a figure with close connections to the Romanian sovereign[56]. The Romanian leaders

[55] *D.D.F.*, deuxième série, tome IX, doc. no. 306, pp. 671-673.

[56] On May 24, 1938, following an audience with the King, Călinescu noted: „If we are siding with the Russians, if victors, we are threatened by Bolshevism. If we are with the Germans, their victory [means] economic and then political subjugation [...] Therefore, we have to look for armed support. I admit that France is in crisis, although on her way of recovery. But there is

thought that a potential Soviet intervention in case of a war between Czechoslovakia and Germany would have placed Romanians in an awkward position. Thus, they should have taken a clear position with regard to the passage of the Red Army through Romanian territory. In this respect, the thoughts of the King of Romania are worth mentioning, as he noted them on May 23, 1938: „[...] If Hungary does not join the dance, we, in accordance with our policy, will not step in automatically against Germany and, therefore, in principle, we will remain neutral, but? Now then, this *but* is Russia. To come to the aid of her ally, she has only two ways of passage, through Poland, or through our land, through the northern part of Bukovina. I don't think that in Russia's present state she could send troops, but certainly she will not delay in moving in with her aircrafts. What can we do? Either we let them pass, which means that we are dragged in at once against Germany, as she will never admit that we become accomplices of the U.S.S.R., and, indirectly, even lend a hand to her enemies. If we oppose, that is if we fire on the planes flying through even at night, we will be in a state of hostility against the Russians and the Czechs and here we are thrown in against our will on the side of Germany. If the Russian planes want to pass over the Polish territory, certainly the Poles will oppose and they will be in a state

England. It is here that we have to couple our policy". The conclusion of his analysis on Romania's external position was pessimistic: „I recognize that we are in a difficult position. 1. Poland is not certain for us and, in any case, the treaty is uncertain in any other direction than Russia. 2. Yugoslavia will never go against Germany. 3. If Germany will attack Czechoslovakia, certainly it is no *casus foederis*. But with an intervention of the Soviets, we will face a difficult question. 4. If Hungary will attack, this is a *casus foederis*, but what are the Poles going to do and what will the Germans do? Let's not forget the public resentment. I think Transylvania is anti-German out of post-war tradition" (Armand Călinescu, *Daily notes 1916-1939*, Edition under care and with preface of Dr. Al. Gh. Savu, Humanitas, Bucharest, 1990, pp. 391-392).

of hostility against the U.S.S.R. According to our alliance, we will be, automatically, dragged into the same situation. This is the trouble we're in"[57]. The analysis made by Carol II leads to the conclusion that the most convenient solution for Romania, at that moment, was to avoid a military German-Czechoslovak conflict. From this standpoint we must understand the advice given by the Romanian to the Czechoslovak leaders, where the key word was „moderation", in the approach to the Sudeten issue. In the same train of thought comes the information addressed by Petrescu-Comnen to the German minister in Bucharest, during the „crisis of May" 1938. The Romanian diplomat expressed the idea that the fate of Czechoslovakia represented a „vital interest" for Romania and noticed that an attack against the Czechoslovak state was going to produce, inevitably, a general war in Europe[58].

By the end of May, rumours were circulating about the assurance offered by the leaders in Bucharest to those in Berlin and Warsaw that they would not allow the passage of the Soviet troops in aid of Czechoslovakia[59]. The authorities in Prague asked immediately the Romanian minister in Prague for explanations. He described most clearly Romania's attitude. Radu

[57] King Carol II of Romania, *Daily notes. 1937-1951*, volume I, March 11, 1937 – September 4, 1938 (books 1-6), edition under care, with notes, glossary and index of Viorica Moisuc, Nicolae Rauş, foreword by Ioan Scurtu, Editura Scripta, Bucharest, 1995, p. 144.

[58] *D.D.F.*, deuxième série, tome IX, doc. no. 422.

[59] Although the Czechoslovaks declared they had information from Soviet sources, it seems they had been fed information also from the French minister of foreign affairs, who informed the Czechoslovak minister in Paris about the fact that Romania would not allow the Soviet troops crossing her territory. Moreover, the French politician should have said that the Romanians had declared the same not only to the French, but also in Berlin and Warsaw (*Documents and materials on the eve of the Second World War*, Vol. I, Editura de Stat, Bucharest, 1948, doc. no. 14, pp. 143-144).

Crutzescu stated that Romanians would not declare openly the fact that they did not allow the passage of the Soviet troops on their territory for at least three reasons. They did not want to weaken the situation of Czechoslovakia and to alter the good neighbour relations with the Soviets, and on the other hand they might have been willing to make public statements on this subject matter alone and only depending on the evolution of events[60]. Nevertheless, the Romanian diplomat was advising the Czechoslovak foreign affairs minister not to fall for futile illusions. Crutzescu expressed his opinion that Romania's consent in connection with the passage of the Soviet troops on her territory was „of the most questionable kind"[61]. Moreover, in early July, one and the same Crutzescu spoke in front of France's minister in Prague with similar wording. He was telling Lacroix that the King had told him that he was determined not to make any statement with regard to the attitude Romania was going to have if Russia would claim wanting to come in aid of Czechoslovakia attacked by Germany, either by air or by land. The Romanian sovereign explained that he „did not intend either to weaken the position of Czechoslovakia or to dissatisfy Russia, expressing earlier his decision to oppose the passage of the Russian aid". The King seems to have also told the Romanian diplomat that he „was going to take a decision at the time when the problem would arise"[62].

Although the Romanian minister in Prague denied the truthfulness of the rumours on Romania's position with regard to the passage of the Soviet troops, such rumours contained

[60] A.M.A.E., Fond 71 / Special files, Vol. 308, Cable no. 1424, May 30, 1938, Prague, R. Crutzescu to Nicolae Petrescu-Comnen, f. 12-13.

[61] *Ibidem*, f. 14; see also the note of the French minister in Prague of May 27, 1938, in *D.D.F.*, deuxième série, tome IX, doc. no. 467, p. 923.

[62] *D.D.F.*, deuxième série, tome X, Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1976, doc. no. 194, p. 357.

however at least a shred of truth. In this period, Radu Djuvara, head of the legation in Berlin, had informed – on his own private behalf – Göring that Romania would not permit the Soviet Union to cross Romania[63]. This attitude was part of Romania's strategy not to arouse the apprehensions of Germany.

Nicolae Petrescu-Comnen was going to act in exactly the same way, when he told – „on my own behalf" – to the sub-secretary of state of the Polish foreign affairs minister, Jan Szembek, then on a voyage in Bucharest, that the Romanians would not allow the passage of the Soviet troops towards Czechoslovakia[64]. Such information reached London, too, in the summer of 1938. The British diplomats accredited in Bucharest reported that the Romanians were opposed to a potential passage of Soviet troops through their territory[65].

Moreover, within the meeting of the Little Entente, held in Bled, on August 21-23, the Romanian foreign affairs minister declared to his Czechoslovak counterpart that the passage of a Soviet army through the territory of Romania would be practically impossible, but that in case of the Soviet airplanes cross-country flight over Romania, the Romanian government would limit themselves to official protests, however with no practical consequences[66]. On the other hand, the confidential minutes of the Little Entente meeting record the dissatisfaction displayed

[63] Rebecca Haynes, *op. cit*., p. 59.

[64] Comnen confered with Szembek on July 26. The Polish diplomat was attending the funerals of Queen Mary (Comte Jean Szembek, *Journal 1933-1939)*, Paris, Librairie Plon, 1952, pp. 325-326).

[65] Keith Nilson, *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Order, 1919-1939*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 244.

[66] Andreas Hillgruber, *Hitler, King Carol and Marshal Antonescu. German-Romanian relations (1938-1944)*, translated from German by Mihai Alexe, 2nd edition and introductory study by Stelian Neagoe, Bucharest, Humanitas, 2007, p. 71; Yvon Lacaze, *La France et Munich. Etude d'un processus décisionnel en matière de relations internationales*, Bern, Francfort-s. Main, New York, Paris, Vienne, Peter Lang, 1992, pp. 363-364.

by the Romanian foreign affairs minister in connection with the attitude of the Soviets in relation with Romania and the rejection by Comnen of the alternative of signing a Romanian-Soviet non-aggression pact, launched by the Czechoslovak foreign affairs minister[67].

The Romanian strategy consisted in not offering to the Germans and Poles any official assurance in the matter of the transit, in order to prevent the even greater weakening of the position of Czechoslovakia and of her two allies, France and the Soviet Union[68]. Nonetheless, as we have seen, the Romanians informed their counterparts in Prague on the fact that, at that moment, Bucharest was not sharing the idea of allowing the passage of the Red Army towards Czechoslovakia.

At a time when the diplomatic pressure on the Romanian leaders was growing, they brought other additional arguments – of legislative nature – to support their point of view. They declared, for instance, that the Constitution enacted on February 27, 1938, contained the specification that no foreign military contingent could be accepted on Romanian territory in absence of relevant special laws[69].

All in all, the speeches of the Romanian leaders about the issue of the passage of Soviet troops did not change in September 1938 either. Thus, a few days prior to the Romanian minister's departure for Geneva, to take part in the annual session of the League of Nations and in the works of the Council[70], Comnen had a meeting with the King, who informed him on the coordinates of Romania's foreign policy. Just as the sovereign had put

[67] A.N.I.C., Fond Royal House. Carol II, file 153/1938, f. 5-6.

[68] Dov B. Lungu, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

[69] Hugh Ragsdale, *The Soviets...*, p. 79.

[70] It seems that Comnen left for Geneva on September 7, as September 10 was the beginning of the reunion of the Council of the League of Nations, to which Romania was also a part (N. P. Comnène, *Preludi del grande dramma...*, p. 75).

down in his daily notes, his opinion was that Romania was relying on close relations with France and Great Britain and on loyalty to her alliances, but that Carol II intended to avoid „at any cost" an involvement in a conflict with Germany[71]. More than that, the King wrote that: „The passage of Soviet troops on our territory is impossible and no Romanian will accept it"[72]. These explanations show us Romania's foreign policy options before the outbreak of the final stage of the Czechoslovak crisis.

On the days of the presence in Geneva of the delegations of the member states of the League of Nations, the Czechoslovakian crisis was going over to a critical stage in mid-September, under the pressure of the German requests, regarding the surrendering of the Sudeten region by the authorities in Prague[73]. Under these circumstances, the international press published a number of information bits about the passage of Soviet planes through the Romanian airspace, as well as news about a possible understanding between Romania and the Soviet Union, in connection with the permission for the Red Army to cross the Romanian territory to go as far as Czechoslovakia[74]. The Romanian authorities refuted immediately such news[75]. The Romanian foreign affairs minister informed the diplomatic missions of Romania that „the news relating to agreements, or at least discussions, with regard to the passage of the Soviet troops through Romania are absolutely false"[76].

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[71] King Carol II of Romania, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

[72] *Ibidem*.

[73] Telford Taylor, *Munich: The Price of Peace*, London, Sydney, Aukland, Toronto, Hodder and Stoughton, 1979, pp. 732-753; 776-794.

[74] Viorica Moisuc, *Romania and the Czechoslovakian crisis...*, doc. no. 40 și 75, pp. 216-217 și 270-271; see A.N.I.C., Fond Ministry of National Propaganda. Foreign press, file 992, f. 212-213 and file 1009, f. 272-274.

[75] Yvon Lacaze, *op. cit.*, p. 365.

[76] Viorica Moisuc, *Romania and the Czechoslovakian crisis...*, doc. no. 84, p. 279.

In the same period of time, upon the initiative of the Comintern, the Communist Party of Romania launched a request asking the Romanian government to declare their resolute attachament for the common security and that in case of war they would associate with the victim of the aggression[77]. Such initiatives were meant to stir up the public opinion in Romania, as the Soviets used various means to generate pressure on the government in Bucharest.

In the discussions held in Geneva with the members of the delegations of France and Great Britain, Nicolae Petrescu-Comnen argued as the King expressed clearly in his diary, namely that it was impossible for the Soviet troops to pass through Romania. For instance, to be more convincing in his meeting with G. Bonnet on September 11, the foreign affairs minister used a map of Europe, trying to explain „the absurdity of the assumption of an attempt of the Soviet troops to pass through Romanian territory, given our railroads and our roads"[78]. Nonetheless, Comnen suggested that Romania might let the Soviet aviation pass through, her response to such an action being the firing of several gunshots which would miss their mark[79]. Moreover, at he moment when Bonnet told him

[77] Jonathan Haslam, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

[78] *Ibidem*, doc. no. 86, p. 282; see also N. P. Comnène, *Preludi del grande dramma...*, pp. 83-86. In his memoirs, Bonnet states that Litvinov asked as a condition for the Soviet intervention the passage of the Soviet troops and planes through Romania. Bonnet claims that in the meeting of September 11, 1938, the Romanian foreign affairs minister denounced the strategy of the Soviets and said that Stalin was not decided to intervene, his aim being to set up at little cost in Bessarabia (Georges Bonnet, *Dans la tourmente, 1938-1948*, Paris, Fayard, 1971, p. 51;). However, such statements on the part of Comnen can not be proven also by the Romanian diplomatic documents or by the memoirs of the Romanian diplomat. The note drawn up by Bonnet at the end of the meeting does not contain such statements either (*D.D.F.*, deuxième serie, tome XI, Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1977 doc. no. 96, p. 161).

[79] *D.D.F.*, deuxième serie, tome XI, Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1977 doc. no. 96, p. 161.

about the idea suggested by Litvinov that the issue of Czechoslovakia be investigated by the League of Nations[80], it is said his answer was that no recommendation from the Council of the League of Nations could change the decision of the Romanians not to authorize the passage of the Soviet troops through their territory[81]. This last detail can be found in his memoirs, but in the Romanian diplomatic documents we have researched there is no clear reference to this subject. On the contrary, the Soviets were advocating the version that Romania implicitly shared the idea that the League of Nations would go public with a statement on the issue of Czechoslovakia, so as to have a legal foundation in case of a potential request of the Soviets to be given the consent to displace their troops towards Czechoslovakia[82].

At the end of his meeting with the French politician, the Romanian minister was telling the authorities in Bucharest that Bonnet had not made any suggestion and had not presented him with any demand with regard to the passage of the Soviet troops through the Romanian territory, and that he had limited himself to just recording the opinions expressed by the Romanian diplomat. Moreover, Comnen did not avoid reminding Bonnet the „issue of the war equipment" which Romania hoped to get from France, and he stressed on the idea that the Romanian military circles were miscontent with the attitude of Paris. Consequently, if the French were not offering an alternative to the Romanians, France might forfeit the „sympathy of

[80] Bonnet did not share either the alternative suggested by Litvinov (see the comments of Viorica Moisuc in *Romania and the Czechoslovakian crisis...*, p. 286, note 3; also, see the note prepared by Bonnet pursuant to his conversation with Litvinov în *D.D.F.*, deuxième serie, tome XI, doc. no. 95, pp. 159-160).

[81] N. P. Comnène, *Preludi del grande dramma...*, p. 84.

[82] Geoffrey Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 57; Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, I, translation by Any and Virgil Florea, with the foreword of Florin Constantiniu, Editura SAECULUM I.O., Bucharest, 1996, pp. 131-132.

our army"[83]. Well, nothing seemed to have changed in Comnen's speech to Bonnet from May to September 1938. What was new, however, was that the Romanian party emphasized the issue of natural obstacles and scarce infrastructure, which would have made it impossible for the Soviet troops capable to assist Czechoslovakia to cross the northern part of Romania in a short time.

One day later (September 12), the head of the Romanian diplomacy encountered Litvinov[84], but, as told by the Romanian diplomat in his cable sent to Bucharest, this meeting did not offer the opportunity of broaching the sensible question of the potential Soviet assistance for Czechoslovakia. The Romanian foreign affairs minister seemed content with the course of his discussion with the Soviet minister, which he judged as follows: „We parted after one hour of conversation, which went on quite satisfactorily"[85]. Comnen's attitude lets us think that he was expecting a more heated discussion with Litvinov, focussed rather on the Czechoslovakian crisis and particularly on the implementation of the Soviet-Czechoslovak treaty of May 1935.

Not later than two days after (September 14), the Romanian foreign affairs minister attended a luncheon in the com-

[83] Viorica Moisuc, *Romania and the Czechoslovakian crisis...*, doc. no. 86, p. 283.

[84] About the meetings of Petrescu-Comnen with Bonnet and Litvinov see also Ivan Pfaff, *Die Sowjetunion und die Verteidigung der Tschechoslowakei, 1934-1938: Versuch der Revision einer Legende*, Cologne, 1996, pp. 390-391. He claims that there had been a meeting between Bonnet and Comnen on September 10, when the French foreign affairs minister arrived in Geneva on September 11. Besides, Pfaff talks about discussions between Comnen and Litvinov on September 9 and 12, while Romanian sources confirm only the meeting on September 12.

[85] Viorica Moisuc, *Romania and the Czechoslovakian crisis...*, doc. no. 89, p. 286. In a copy of the document it is written that the meeting had lasted „one and a half hour", see A.M.A.E., Fond 71 / Switzerland, Vol. 6, f. 265.

pany of H. Bérenger, chairman of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the French Senate, of M. Litvinov and another French representative. During their conversation, Bérenger told his companions that the British had given a negative reply to the question whether they were willing to help France in case of a war with Germany. The disclosures of the French senator made Comnen remark, in his cable to the King and the President of the Cabinet Council, the fact that: „Such valuable statements prove how reasonable our careful policy is and how guardedly we should accept the formal assurances of certain foreign statesmen and diplomats, who are trying to make us believe that the situation is completely different than it actually is"[86]. Obviously, Comnen was referring to the rumours circulating in the diplomatic milieus on the possibility of the involvement of France, Great Britain and the Soviet Union next to Czechoslovakia in a potential armed conflict.

These opinions are substantiated by the evolution of the Czechoslovakian crisis. For instance, when he learned that the British Secretary of State was going to travel to Germany to see Hitler (meeting on September 15), the Romanian foreign affairs minister notes that such an action shows how much France and Great Britain were lacking resoluteness[87]. The Romanian leaders kept to their expectant policy, carefully exploring the information flow coming in through diplomatic channels. They kept on to sustain, just as Comnen was stating before Herriot, that „Romania will religiously fulfil her contract obligations", but that taking on additional commitments was possible only with the agreement of Poland, Yugoslavia and

[86] Viorica Moisuc, *Romania and the Czechoslovakian crisis...*, doc. no. 121, pp. 323-324; see also N. P. Comnène, *Preludi del grande dramma...*, pp. 91-92.

[87] Viorica Moisuc, *Romania and the Czechoslovakian crisis...*, doc. no. 132, p. 344.

the Balkan states[88]. Nonetheless, British diplomatic sources recorded also one more face of the statement of the chief of the Romanian diplomacy. The leader of the British delegation in Geneva, the Earl De La Warr, was transmitting to London that during the meeting with the Romanian foreign affairs minister, held in mid-September, the latter had declared that „in case of war, assisting Czechoslovakia would be possible through Romania and that he himself believed that there was no difficulty at all in the approval of the transit, especially for airplanes". According to De La Warr, the Romanian minister had also said that the authorities in Bucharest would restrain their response to a note of protest in case of a cross-country flight of the Soviet squadrons through Romanian airspace[89]. However, Comnen wanted by all means to point out to the English politician that Romania's land road and railroad infrastructure was not appropriate to allow the passage of a modern army[90]. Comnen maintained the same range of wording also in his discussion with Paul Boncour, on September 14, 1938. He suggested to the French politician that, in case of war, the Romanians would accept the Soviet planes passage through their airspace[91].

Still in mid-September, the representatives of the Romanian Foreign Affairs Ministry had to answer the question raised by the members of the Polish, Yugoslav and Czechoslovak diplomatic missions accredited in Bucharest: what attitude was Romania intending to choose to a potential passage request through Romania for the Soviet troops. The question came on the background of contradicting information items that were

[88] *Ibidem*, doc. no. 135, p. 349.; Yvon Lacaze, *op. cit.*, p. 366.

[89] D.B.F.P, Third series, Vol. II, 1938, doc. no. 898, apud Viorica Moisuc, Gheorghe Matei, *op. cit.*, p. 315.

[90] *Ibidem*.

[91] N. P. Comnène, *Preludi del grande dramma...*, p. 90.

being circulated in the diplomatic milieus and was also influenced by the result of the meeting between Hiltler and Chamberlain in Berghof[92]. The Romanian officials replied that the news spread around was just mere intrigues, and that Romania's position had not changed at all over the last days[93].

In the last decade of September, when the Czechoslovakian crisis had reached its peak, the major undertakings of the Romanian diplomacy were directed, particularly, to blocking Hungary's potential military intervention and preventing the possible annexation of Slovakia to Hungary[94]. On the other hand, the leaders in Bucharest delayed answering the Czechoslovakians' question of September 21, namely: how would Romania respond in case of an indirect assistance extended by Hungary to the Third *Reich*[95]. The Foreign Affairs Minister *ad-interim*, Mircea Cancicov, took as a pretext the delayed response from Comnen, who had not transmitted to Bucharest his opinion on the question raised by the Czechoslovaks. In fact, the decision had been taken in Bucharest, and Comnen had been merely notified with regard to the „project of reply"

[92] About the information circulating in the international press and the diplomatic milieus, at mid-September, on a possible Romanian-Soviet agreement with regard to the Red Army passing through the territory of Romania, see Ivan Pfaff, *op. cit.*, pp. 394-397; Viorica Moisuc, *Romania and the Czechoslovakian crisis...*, doc. no. 200, p. 440. See, for instance, also the communication of Litvinov to the American journalist L. Fischer on September 16, 1938. The Soviet minister was confessing to the journalist that the Romanians were going to let the Soviets pass with their troops, because they were more in favour of the Czechslovaks than were the Polish (Louis Fischer, *Men and Politics: An Autobiography* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1941, p. 561).

[93] A.M.A.E., Fond 71 / Special files, Vol. 308, Cable no. 55345, September 15, 1938, Bucharest, M. Cancicov to Nicolae Petrescu-Comnen, then in Geneva, f. 66.

[94] Viorica Moisuc, *Romania and the Czechoslovakian crisis...*, doc. no. 292, p. 561.

[95] *Ibidem*, doc. no. 259, p. 523 and doc. no. 276, pp. 543-544.

of the Romanian government. The Romanians dodged giving a clear-cut answer and they advised the Czechoslovaks to read the minutes of the meeting in Bled. Incidentally, since the very beginning of September, for the Romanian leaders there was available a survey prepared by the political direction of the Foreign Affairs ministry, deemed to be top secret, pointing out the fact that in the military agreements of the Little Entente no express specification was made of a military intervention against Hungary, and in other cases only a direct attack of Budapest against one of the Little Entente states was mentioned[96].

On September 26, 1938, in one of their small groups (the Patriarch, Mircea Cancicov and Călinescu) sessions, the Cabinet Council decided that Romania should adopt o neutral attitude in case of a potential armed conflict[97]. There are even certain authors claiming that, on September 23, King Carol II had transmitted to the ambassador of Poland, through the agency of the Royal Palace minister, the information that Romania had decided not to intervene in case of a potential attack of Hungary against Czechoslovakia[98]. On the same day, the minister of France in Bucharest met Alexandru Cretzianu, director of the Political Department of the Foreign Affairs Ministry of Romania, who specified for him that Romania would condone the flight of the Soviet planes through the Romanian airspace, but would stay equally determinated in their opposition to the crossing of their territory by the Russian troops under way to Czechoslovakia. Besides, Cretzianu stated that the leaders in Bucharest thought that Czechoslovakia's decision to mobilize their army (September 23) was „dangerous and regrettable"[99].

[96] *Ibidem*, doc. no. 8, pp. 167-169. The note had been drawn up in three copies, one of which was handed over to Nicolae Petrescu-Comnen.

[97] Armand Călinescu, *op. cit.*, p. 397.

[98] Dov B. Lungu, *op. cit.*, pp. 134-135.

[99] C.A.D.N., Fond Bucarest – Legation, carton 37, Cable no. 877-881, Thierry, Bucharest, September 26, 1938.

Under these conditions, on the last days of September, the subject matter of the passage of Soviet troops through Romanian territory is no longer to be encountered as a central concern of the political leaders in Bucharest, although the Chief of Staff of the Romanian Army was voicing his opinion that Romania might allow the Soviet troops to cross the Romanian territory, in case of absolute need, and based on certain official assurances[100].

In fact, on the last days of September, under the impact of the reaction of the great powers involved in the Czechoslovakian crisis, the King decided on neutrality and did not approve the mobilization requested by the Higher General Staff[101]. The authorities in Bucharest, looking to eliminate those elements that could have aroused Germany's suspicions, asked the Romanian press to speak only about Romania's wish for peace, and not to allow any more criticism directed against the Second Reich[102]. The fact that the Romanian diplomacy acted in the following span of time as per the principle set by the King is proven, for instance, by the several cables dispatched by the Romanian Foreign Affairs Ministry to Belgrade, Prague and Warsaw on September 26 and 27, 1938[103].

Cross-country flight over Romania for Soviet airplanes (April-September 1938)

The political and diplomatic milieus were aware of the fact that through the airspace of Romania flew airplanes of Soviet

[100] Yvon Lacaze, *op. cit.*, p. 368.

[101] Ioan Talpeş, *Diplomacy and defense...*, p. 241; vezi şi Larry L. Watts, *op. cit.*, pp. 47-48.

[102] C.A.D.N., Fond Bucarest – Legation, carton 37, cable no. 882-885, Thierry, Bucharest, September 26, 1938.

[103] Viorica Moisuc, *Romania and the Czechoslovakian crisis...*, doc. no. 361, 382, 383.

production, meant for Czechoslovakia[104]. Since late April, the diplomatic representatives and consular agents accredited in Romania were transmitting such data in their reports. However, contradictory information was circulating about the number of airplanes intended for Czechoslovakia and about Romania's attitude in this „business"[105]. In order to obtain an official position of the Romanian authorities, the German minister in Bucharest, Fabricius, had a meeting with the Romanian foreign affairs minister on April, 30. The latter told the German diplomat that for the Romanian government it was not possible to stop the Russian planes cross-country flight over Romania, since this was in tune with the „international practice"[106]. At that time, the Germans were informed that seven Soviet planes had crossed Romania's airspace in flight towards Czechoslovakia.

Such information continued to be gathered by the foreign missions accredited in Romania. As per German sources, until September more than 300 Soviet airplanes had been delivered. The airplanes should have been marked with the emblem of Czechoslovakia, should have not carried weapons and should have overflown non-stop the territory of Romania[107]. The mili-

[104] Keith Nilson, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

[105] See information on the remarks made by the Polish consul in Kishinev, in Hugh Ragsdale, *The Soviets...*, p. 84.

[106] Rebecca Haynes, *op. cit.*, p. 60; Andreas Hillgruber, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-68.

[107] Rebecca Haynes, *op. cit.*, p. 60. Within the German legation in Bucharest there happened a dispute between minister Fabricius and the military attaché, about the number of Soviet airplanes bound for Czechoslovakia crossing the Romanian airspace. The minister was denying the information sent to Berlin by the military attaché, considering that the data on dozens and hundreds of Soviet airplanes were mere inventions (*German Diplomats in Bucharest 1937-1944. From the memoirs of dr. Rudolf Pusch, legation attaché, and dr. Gerhard Stelzer, legation secretary general*, translation by Ileana Sturdza and Cristian Scarlat, edition under the care of, with notes, index and illustration selection by Cristian Scarlat, Editura All Educational, Bucharest, 2001, pp. 98-99).

tary attaché of France in Bucharest reported, on September 19, 1938, about the extent of the Soviet plane transit towards Czechoslovakia, crossing the airspace of Romania. Colonel A. Delmas was explaining that: „Everybody here knows that for some time already many Soviet airplanes are flying over the territory of Romania, heading for Czechoslovakia. They have been seen flying over Piatra Neamț and Bukovina. In the beginning it was thought that they were the lot of planes Czechoslovakia has bought in Russia, but as the passages are going on and on, everybody is sure – despite all official denials, that they are battle planes commissioned to Czechoslovakia for the event of a German invasion [...] There have been counted several hundred Russian planes, at least three hundred have passed the border into Czechoslovakia. Everybody thinks this is an absolutely normal action, and the government turns the blind eye. This proves that Romania wishes that Czechoslovakia be able to oppose the strongest resistance possible facing a German aggression"[108].

The research carried out over the last decades in the Romanian archives (both diplomatic and military) reveals the fact that the transit of the Soviet airplanes to Czechoslovakia took place based on an agreement concluded between the Romanian and the Czechoslovak governments[109], although for the time being the wording of the agreement is yet unknown. The Romanian historians who have conducted research work in the military archives are quoting, in this respect, a note set up under the aegis of the Ministry of Air and Navy, on April 13, 1938, where it is mentioned that: „Under the no. 170 of

[108] Apud Viorica Moisuc, *Premises of Romania's political isolation 1919-1940*, Humanitas, Bucharest, 1991, p. 351 (E.M.A.T. – Vincennes, 7N-3052, Report no. 87 S, Bucharest, September 19, 1938, signed by Delmas, to the minister of defense, E.M.A., Bureau 2, Secret. The report is entitled *La roumanie devant le conflit germano-tchécoslovaque*).

[109] Ioan Talpeş, *Diplomacy and defense...*, p. 221.

November 24, 1937, the Czechoslovak military attaché sent to the Higher General Staff a copy of the intervention with the Ministry of Air and Navy with regard to the 21 bombers (type S.B., 450 km/hour), bought by Czechoslovakia from the USSR, in cross-country flight over the Romanian territory"[110]. Under the circumstances, the Ministry of Air and Navy extended its agreement for the cross-country flight and „the Romanian Higher General Staff advised the border troops and the authorities in charge about this cross-country flight. Later, the Czechoslovak military attaché informed lieutenant colonel Moldoveanu A., chief of Section 2 of the Higher General Staff that the matter of the planes was going to be resolved by Minister Veverka with H.M. the King"[111]. No notes have been found yet in connection with the discussions between Carol II and the minister of Czechoslovakia in Romania. However, there are other sources, too, which confirm that such an agreement had been concluded. For instance, in June 1938, the Czechoslovak Foreign Affairs Minister was transmitting to the Poles that his country had signed an agreement with Romania, allowing the cross-country flight of the Soviet planes meant for Czechoslovakia over the Romanian territory[112]. Moreover, in mid-June 1938, Comnen was informing the minister plenipotentiary of Romania in Prague with something he considered strictly confidential, namely that the Czechoslovaks had asked Romania's permission that 40 Soviet airplanes should cross her airspace. The Romanian foreign affairs minister explained

[110] *Ibidem*, pp. 221-222; vezi Idem, *New data concerning...*, pp. 1658-1659; Czechoslovakia concluded an agreement with the Soviet Union in April 1937, regarding the purchase of Soviet airplanes (Hugh Ragsdale, *The Soviets...*, p. 86).

[111] Ioan Talpeş, *Diplomacy and defense...*, p. 222; Idem, *New data concerning...*, p. 1658; Larry Watts, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

[112] Hugh Ragsdale, *The Soviets...*, p. 84.

that the Romanians had given this permission, in accordance with the international treaties and after having consulted with the Poles[113].

The note set up by the representatives of the Ministry of Air and Navy states that, until April 13, 1938, 10 Soviet airplanes bound for Czechoslovakia had crossed the Romanian airspace and one of them had an emergency landing near Baia Mare[114]. Such flights continued in the following months. The Romanian military authorities had data on the cross-country flight over Romania of 7 planes in June, and the on July 14 other 4 airplanes had flown from the Soviet Union to Czechoslovakia[115]. Also, on July 21 and 22, 8 more planes flew over the territory of Romania, one of them landing on the Iassy airport for refuelling[116]. On the other hand, reports prepared by the Special Intelligence Service informed that in June, because of bad weather, several Soviet planes bound for Czechoslovakia had landed in Iassy[117].

A note drawn up by the same Special Intelligence Service, dated September 1, 1938, contains the following considerations: „In May, June, July and August, a number of Soviet airplanes have passed from the USSR to Czechoslovakia, flying over the northern part of the territory of our country"[118]. According to the same sources, the number of Soviet make airplanes that has passed towards Czechoslovakia amounted to about 70-90 planes[119]. Moreover, their motors were of Czechoslovak make

[113] *Ibidem*, p. 86.

[114] Ioan Talpeş, *Diplomacy and defense...*, p. 222; Idem, *New data concerning...*, p. 1659; Larry Watts, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-50.

[115] Ioan Talpeş, *Diplomacy and defense...*, p. 222.

[116] *Ibidem*, p. 222

[117] A.N.I.C., Fond PCM-SSI, file 13/1938, f. 109-110.

[118] *Ibidem*, f. 111.

[119] *Ibidem*, f. 112.

and had been conveyed into the USSR, by railway, also through Romanian territory, thus arousing the attention of Poland. Questioned by the Poles in connection with these transports, the Romanian authorities replied that „it has not been known that there were airplane engines because at customs they were declared as miscellaneous equipment, and the officials had not the training to be able to ascertain the type of equipment"[120]. The document issued by the Special Intelligence Service contained also the specification that the airplanes were equipped with Soviet machine-guns which, once they had landed in Czechoslovakia, were replaced with Czechoslovak machine-guns. At the same time, the planes were marked with Czechoslovak emblems and named „Avia" type B. 71[121], although there were data available telling that some planes had crossed the Polish airspace marked with the symbols of the Romanian civil airlines (Y R), to avoid attacks[122].

There is evidence that, in September, a greater number of planes crossed from the Soviet Union to Czechoslovakia than in the previous months. Certain authors estimate even that, in September 1938, „above the territory of Romania an air bridge was constituted practically between the USSR and Czechoslovakia"[123]. Data are available proving the approval of the Romanian authorities on July 30, 1938, for the cutting out of a „neutral zone for planes flying at the Romanian-Czech-

[120] *Ibidem*.

[121] This was the designation given by the Czechoslovaks to the Soviet bomber SB–2 (Hugh Ragsdale, *The Soviets...*, p. 86).

[122] A.N.I.C., PCM-SSI, file 13/1938, f. 111, 113. Certain British diplomatic documents show that the Poles tried to intercept, to no avail, the Soviet planes flying through their airspace heading for Czechoslovakia (D.B.F.P., Third Series, volume I, 1938, doc. no. 411, p. 482).

[123] Ioan Talpeş, *Diplomacy and defense...*, p. 223, note 28; see Hugh Ragsdale, *The Soviets...*, pp. 84-85.

oslovak border"[124]. Also, competent observers – such as the minister of France in Romania (A. Thierry) – stated that, when the Munich Conference was being organized, in Czechoslovakia there were 200 planes of Soviet origin, which had mostly passed to destination between September 10 and 15, through the Romanian airspace[125]. On the other hand, Romanian and French military sources stated that about 400 Soviet airplanes had crossed the Romanian airspace bound to Czechoslovakia[126]. Anyway, certain authors who have researched the Czechoslovak sources dispute the fact that, at the Munich moment, several hundred airplanes of Soviet provenance were present on the Czechoslovak territory[127].

The Romanian phraseology when being pressured by both Germans and Poles to allow no more the passage of Soviet airplanes was a simple strategy. Whenever asked about this subject matter, they declared that just a few planes had succeeded to cross over, simply because they were flying at heights between 3000 and 4000 metres. Because of this, the Romanian air-defense artillery could not reach them. However, as far as it seems, the Soviet airplanes were flying at maximum 1000 metres, so that they were in the range of the Romanian air-defense artillery[128]. On the other hand, the Romanian officials did not avoid stating to the French that, as long as the clauses of their treaty with Poland did not allow them to accept the

[124] Ioan Talpeș, *Diplomacy and defense...*, p. 223 (the quoted information come from the Archives of the Ministry of National Defense, Fond 333- P, file 197, f. 286-287).

[125] Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *History of international relations 1919-1947*, Vol. 1, translation by Anca Airinei, Editura Științelor Sociale și Politice, 2006, Bucharest, p. 166.

[126] Larry L. Watts, *op. cit.*, p. 51; Nicole Jordan, *The Popular Front and Central Europe: the dilemmas of French impotence, 1918-1940*, Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 287-288.

[127] Igor Lukes, *Stalin and Czechoslovakia in 1938...*, passim.

[128] Ioan Talpeș, *Diplomacy and defense...*, p. 223.

passage of Soviet planes, they had chosen to simply „look the other way" and to allow their flights between the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia[129].

In his daily notes, Carol II wrote in the column of the 26th of May that, in spite of the Polish protests, the Romanian authorities had no legal ways to prevent the transit of Soviet airplanes to Czechoslovakia, when „supplying war materials to an allied country in times of peace was permitted". However, he suggested that the planes „should no more fly unannounced and by night, to let us have control"[130]. This last sentence of the sovereign is, on the one hand, proof that the Romanians had approved the passage of the Soviet airplanes intended for their Czechoslovak ally and, on the other hand, it shows that the Romanian authorities had no actual control over the flights from the USSR towards Czechoslovakia. By the way, this can be easily noticed from an analysis of the diplomatic and military documents.

[129] N. P. Comnen, *Un point d'histoire vécue*, în „Acta historica", t. I, Romae, 1959, p. 320.

[130] King Carol II of Romania, *op. cit.*, p. 149. The repeated cross-country flights of Soviet planes through the Romanian airspace determined the Minister of Defense to request, as per a note made on a report drawn up by the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in August 1938, an intervention of the government to stop the cross-country flights of the Soviet airplanes over the Romanian territory. The subject matter was dispatched to the foreign affairs minister, who analyzed the situation. But, in order not to annoy the Soviets, the Romanians avoided to protest against these operations. But they spoke to the Soviets about these cases at the begining of September. We have to note the fact that the report does not say whether the planes were bound for Czechoslovakia or if they were just „recon flights". One more thing worth emphasizing is that the cross-country flights had upset the Romanian Army commanders (A.M.A.E., Fond 71 / U.S.S.R., file 85, Report – Cross-country flight of Soviet planes over the Romanian territory, August 5, 1938, signed by Scarlat Grigoriu, f. 370; see also Cable no. 1935, September 2, 1938, Moscow, N. Dianu to Nicolae Petrescu-Comnen, f. 396).

A controversial document

But Romania's place in the history of the Czechoslovakian crisis is connected to the „emergence" of a controversial document, published by the historian Jiri Hochman in 1984[131], and then in Romania by Viorica Moisuc in 2010[132]. It is a note drawn up in French and signed by the Romanian foreign affairs minister, dated September 24, 1938, which expresses the consent of the government in Bucharest with the passage of the Soviet troops through the territory of Romania, in case Czechoslovakia was attacked by Germany. Besides the request that the Soviets should not get involved in Romania's internal affairs, the Romanian authorities imposed no condition to the Soviets and renounced to obtain any guarantee with respect to Bessarabia or the border between Romania and Hungary. Nonetheless, one fragment of the note makes reference to the idea of an indirect acknowledgement of Bessarabia's belonging to Romania: „...renonçant sans réserve aux conditions garanties de toutes sortes du côté soviétique pour la permission roumaine de passage [...] a) à toute garantie donnée par votre pays sur l'inviolabilité territoriale de la Bassarabie en tant que partie intégrante de la Roumanie". This fragment could be understood as an indirect acknowledgement by the Soviets of Bessarabia as part of Romania. But we know that the Soviets did not agree with introducing of the idea that the Dniester was the border between the two countries during the negotiations referring to the Prague-Moscow airline[133].

[131] See Jiri Hochman, *op. cit.*, pp. 194-201 (appendix C – *Text of a Note of the Romanian Government to the Government of the Soviet Union, September 24, 1938*). The document was published also in Viorica Moisuc, *Romania and the Czechoslovakian crisis...*, doc. no. 325, pp. 591-597.

[132] The document was published also in Viorica Moisuc, *Romania and the Czechoslovakian crisis...*, doc. no. 325, pp. 591-597.

[133] *Romanian-Soviet Relations. Documents*, Vol. II, doc. no. 94, pp. 206-208.

The document mentions the fact that the Romanian authorities allowed the passage of 100 000 soldiers by land (at most 650 cannons and 300 tanks), and also that they made available an air corridor (starting on September 25), so that the Soviets could send people and supplies to Czechoslovakia. One more point stipulated that the army was going to be allowed only six days passage right, starting from conflict outbreak, as it was considered that the German army could not use airports in Czechoslovakia to attack Romania[134]. The document estimates that the Soviets had been thus able to transit about 250 000-350 000 soldiers and an amount of materials required to compensate the quantity advantage of the German army over the Czechoslovak army[135]. The Soviet soldiers and war equipment should have passed towards Czechoslovakia through the North of Romania, along a route (Mogilev – Khotyn – Chernivtsi – Rădăuți – Câmpulung – Vatra Dornei – Bistrița – Dej – Baia Mare – Negreşti – Ťačovo) by-passing Bessarabia. Also, the document shows that the Romanian note was based on a secret preliminary agreement of September 13, 1938. At the end, the document contains the specification that the Romanian leaders were expecting the reply of the Soviet government. It also informed Litvinov on the fact that a copy of the document was to be sent to the Czechoslovak government as well[136].

Jiri Hochman şi Ivan Pfaff[137], just as other historians, too, used this document in order to prove that Czechoslovakia had been betrayed in the fall of 1938 by the Soviets and the French.

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[134] Jiri Hochman, *op. cit.*, p. 198 ; Viorica Moisuc, *Romania and the Czechoslovakian crisis...*, p. 593.

[135] Jiri Hochman, *op. cit.*, p. 200 ; Viorica Moisuc, *Romania and the Czechoslovakian crisis...*, p. 597.

[136] *Ibidem*.

[137] Ivan Pfaff, *Die Sowjetunion und die Verteidigung der Tschechoslowakei, 1934-1938: Versuch der Revision einer Legende*, Cologne, 1996, pp. 392-397.

The fact that the Soviet Union did not offer any answer to the proposal of the Romanians is one more proof – in these historians' opinion – for the idea that the Soviets were not interested to help Czechoslovakia, as they claimed, but rather to incense a conflict among the European powers[138].

The authenticity of this document has been questioned by Hugh Ragsdale, who construed his arguments based on the frequent French language errors, confirmed by our survey – or, Comnen and the Romanian officials were proficient in French -, as well as on certain inconsistencies in the text[139]. He wondered to what extent the statement was true that the Soviets had succeeded in transferring 250 000 soldiers by plane, in such short time and in times of war[140]. Even more, the track gauge difference has to be taken into account between the Soviet and the Romanian railway systems, as well as the damages on part of the 473 km railroad on Romanian territory. Even if Ragsdale considers that the document is not credible, he reopens the debates on the Red Army mobilization in September 1938, and on the intentions concealed behind this action[141].

In his work published in 1996, Ivan Pfaff quotes the Romanian archives and those in Prague when he refers to the note in question, stating that the document seems to have been sent to Prague, handed over by personal messenger to Litvinov in Geneva and offered by the Romanian minister in Moscow, Nicolae Dianu, to the deputy minister of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, Potemkin, on the 24th of September[142]. Besides, when he refers to the origin of the document,

[138] See, for instance, Hochman's opinion (Jiri Hochman, *op. cit.*, pp. 74-75.

[139] See a criticism on the document in Hugh Ragsdale, *The Munich Crisis…*, pp. 614-617; see, also, Idem, *The Soviets…*, pp. 149-151.

[140] *Ibidem*, p. 150.

[141] See the argumentation in *Ibidem*, pp. 93-192.

[142] Ivan Pfaff, *op. cit.*, p. 398, note 48.

Hochman says he has got it from Ivan Pfaff, who allegedly had found it in the Archives of the Foreign Affairs Ministry of Romania but, in his 1966 work, Pfaff does not mention that the document had been published with his consent more than one decade earlier than by Hochman.

Several historians have shown their interest in this document, historians who have found that it did not contain any precise statement which would at least be hinting to such an understanding or to discussions between Litvinov and Comnen[143]. Moreover, Pfaff's work, where he offers details about the negotiations between Comnen and Litvinov, contains interpretation errors and obvious documentation gaps[144]. The same doubt has affected, by the way, also other contributions of the Czech historian, expatriate in Germany[145]. At the same time, Pfaff claims that, pursuant to several meetings, Litvinov and Comnen had reached an agreement with regard to Romania's acceptance for the passage of the Soviet troops in a secret meeting that took place in a safe-house of the Czechoslovak military attaché, in Crassier, near Geneva, on the afternoon of September 14[146]. He quotes Czechoslovak diplomatic sources in support of his point of view. However, we can identify a discrepancy between Pfaff's allegations and the document published by Hochman and Moisuc. As already mentioned,

[143] In this sense, see the comments by Zara Steiner, *The Soviet Commissariat of Foreign Affairs and the Czechoslovakian Crisis in 1938: New Material from the Soviet Archives*, în „The Historical Journal", Vol. 42, No. 3 (Sep., 1999), pp. 763-764. Z. Steiner seems, however, convinced by the arguments sustained by Pfaff.

[144] Hugh Ragsdale, *The Munich Crisis…*, pp. 615-616.

[145] Eckhard Hübner, *Neues Licht auf die sowjetische Außenpolitik vor dem Zweiten Weltkrieg? Zum Aufsatz von Ivan Pfaff "Stalins Strategie der Sowjetisierung Mitteleuropas 1935-1938. Das Beispiel Tschechoslowakei"*, in „Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte", 40. Jahrg., 1. H. (Jan., 1992), pp. 79-94.

[146] Ivan Pfaff, *op. cit.*, p. 392.

the document shows that Petrescu-Comnen and Litvinov had reached a preliminary agreement on September 13, not one day later, as claimed by Pfaff[147]. Or, Pfaff makes no reference to the 13th of September, nor does he offer any explanation for this discrepancy.

Moreover, when analyzing the „technical" side of the published document in comparison with the data inscribed by Pfaff in the footnotes to his work, we may notice that for Hochman and Moisuc the secret code used for the encryption of the document is 49/38, while Pfaff record it as 76/38[148]. Also, the transmission hour of the document by personal messenger to Litvinov is different: 9:12 in the first case and 9:32 in the second case.

None of the main actors in this event, who had later the opportunity to tell in their memoirs about the document which changes the outlook on the Soviet policy and on Romania's foreign policy strategy in the fall of 1938, does mention one single word about such an agreement. In his works and in some articles, Petrescu-Comnen describes his meetings with Litvinov in September 1938, but he offers no clue at all about any potential negotiations[149]. Certainly, after the Second World War, in a Europe partly overpowered by the Soviet Union and by communism it was at least risky for Comnen to „disclose" such a political arrangement. However, in my attempt to understand his mindset, both for his years as an active member of Romania's diplomatic corps, as well as during his exile, I came to discover a cerebral, cautious character, aloof in attitude, but

[147] Jiri Hochman, *op. cit.*, pp. 195-196; Viorica Moisuc, *Romania and the Czechoslovakian crisis...*, p. 593; Ivan Pfaff, *op. cit.*, pp. 392-393.

[148] Jiri Hochman, *op. cit.*, p. 194; Viorica Moisuc, *Romania and the Czechoslovakian crisis...*, p. 591; Ivan Pfaff, *op. cit.*, p. 398, note 48.

[149] Besides the works quoted until now, see how the Romanian diplomat describes Litvinov in his book *Luci e ombre sull'Europa (1914-1950)*, Milano, Bompiani, 1957, pp. 176-192.

I noticed also some „megalomania", causing his being drawn to the „grand politics". Or, from this point of view, I think that Nicolae Petrescu-Comnen should have felt enticed to disclose this detail, which would have bought him a place in the 20th century history, as he had told about other less known actions of his diplomatic career. Bu he did not!

The same kind of behaviour can be seen also in other diplomats and politicians who, according to Pfaff, may have known about the act of September 24, 1938. Neither the Soviets, nor the Czechoslovaks[150] left such information to posterity, and from the memoirs of King Carol II of Romania the pages dedicated to the events of the fall 1938 are missing.

On the other hand, the document differs – as noticed by specialists[151] from Romania's actions abroad during the crisis burst out in Central Europe. Although, in the opinion of the Romanian Army General Staff, expressed on September 23, 1938, the Soviet Union was looked at as a possible ally when Poland and Hungary had fallen in with Germany's position as to Czechoslovakia[152], this does not mean that the Romanians were ready to offer the Soviet troops the passage right for a restricted time span and not consulting with the French and British in this matter.

Therefore, if we extend Hugh Ragsdale's criticism to the note of the Romanian government signed by Comnen and forwarded to the Soviet government on September 24, we consider that there are data enough to raise a question mark as to the reliability of this document.

[150] I am speaking here, particularly, of Eduard Beneš. See the memoirs of the President of Czechoslovakia: *Memoirs of Dr. Edouard Beneš. From Munich to New War and New Victory*, translated by Godfrey Lias, Boston, Haughton Mifflin, 1954, *passim*.

[151] Dov B. Lungu, *op. cit.*, p. 256, note 79; Viorica Moisuc, *Romania and the Czechoslovakian crisis...*, p. 593, note 3.

[152] Larry Watts, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

Conclusions

It is obvious that the Romanians allowed the passage of Soviet airplanes through the Romanian airspace and besides offered them the chance of stop-overs on Romanian territory. However, the Romanian authorities had no perfect control over the flights from the Soviet Union towards Czechoslovakia. Therefore it is hard to estimate how many Soviet planes reached Czechoslovakia, flying through the airspace of Romania, during the Sudeten crisis. Still, we agree with the conclusion put by I. Talpeş, namely that the Romanian airspace was crossed also by other planes than merely those bought by Czechoslovakia from the Soviet Union[153].

The Romanians consented to the passage of the Soviet airplanes because they were interested that Czechoslovakia increased her military force, as the Czechoslovak state was one of Romania's important allies. Under these circumstances, the leaders hoped that the Czechoslovaks would go on supplying armament to Romania, much needed when the French did not meet their commitments. Besides, the April 1937 agreement concluded by Czechoslovakia with the Soviets for the purchase of airplanes and, further on, the consent of the Romanian party for cross-flights through the Romanian airspace, since before the outbreak of the Sudeten crisis, provided the legal basis for the delivery of such planes during the Czechoslovakian crisis. Thus, the Romanians simply fulfilled somewhat liberally their commitments as Czechoslovakia's military ally, trying at the same time to prevent potential disputes with Poland or Germany. This explains their need to conceal the extent of an operation which was, anyhow, beyond their very strict control.

As Yvon Lacaze was stating, the Romanians were facing an awkward dilemma in the matter of the passage of Soviet

[153] Ioan Talpeş, *Diplomacy and defense...*, p. 221.

troops. Would they let the Soviet troops pass through, then they turned into an enemy for Germany and were exposed to the communist menace, if not, it meant that they were supporting the German expansion policy to Eastern Europe[154]. In the time of the Czechoslovakian crisis, the Romanian leaders sought to give an answer to this dilemma by this very approval of the Soviet planes passage towards Czechoslovakia, thus proving their willingness to help their ally threatened by Germany. It was precisely this kind of attitude which made certain political leaders (Litvinov and even Beneš) consider that Romania would allow the Red Army to cross her territory or, at least, she would not oppose the airborne support the Soviet Union was able to supply to Czechoslovakia in case of war. Consequently, the Romanians seemed to be inclined, in case of an armed conflict, to keep on putting up with the violation of their airspace, but were opposed to the passage of Red Army troops through Romania by land.

[154] Yvon Lacaze, *op. cit.*, p. 357.

Romania's Post-Munich Alternatives in Foreign Policy

Mihail E. Ionescu

The attempt to decipher the agreement signed by the four powers in Munich raises two fundamental questions: (1) did the decision makers in Bucharest – and if they did, to what extent – correctly understand the significance of this moment from the perspective of Romania's strategic positioning given the international dynamics that started to take shape? and (2) which were the "scenarios" envisioned in Bucharest and how did the foreign policy planners "adjust" their political calculus in response to the deterioration of the international environment?

Post-Munich assessment

The assessment of the international landscape in the period immediately following the Munich episode outlined, unreservedly, the inevitability of general war on the European continent. The analyses and the statements of the decision makers from that period offer clues regarding the manner in which the authorities in Bucharest understood and interpreted the consequences of the "concession" to Germany.

It can be said that the Romanian foreign policy correctly understood the German threat over Czechoslovakia. In this respect, the discussion between the Romanian foreign minister, N. Petrescu-Comnen, and the German representative in Bucharest, Wilhelm Fabricius (May 22, 1938), is relevant, the

Romanian official bluntly stating that "an armed conflict between Germany and Czechoslovakia will undoubtedly cause a European conflict"[1]. And, from the Romanian perspective, anything that endangered the existence of Czechoslovakia could not leave Romania insensitive[2]. Illustrating for the common destiny of the two countries is the discussion between E. Beneš and the Romanian diplomat Aurelian, on April 21, 1938, when the latter's mission came to an end. The Czechoslovak president considered that collaboration between Germany and the Soviet Union could not be ruled out when the latter will be separated from the Western powers. "In this case, Beneš continued, the countries that are found between Germany and Russia, namely Poland, Czechoslovakia and Romania, would find themselves at the mercy of the two major powers. That is why I based my safety system not only on the Western powers, but also on Russia"[3].

This basic orientation explains, in fact, two major developments. First, Romania's decision to permit the transit of Soviet troops on its territory in order to help Czechoslovakia, something necessary in case the French-Soviet and Soviet-Czechoslovak pacts would have been activated in the autumn of 1938. On September 14, 1938, Romania's decision was delivered to the British delegate in Geneva, Herbrand Sackville, 9th Earl De La Warr, by the Romanian foreign minister himself, who mentioned that "in case of war, the helping of Czechoslovakia can be done through Romania, adding that he personally believes that there are no obstacles to allow the passage, especially for aircraft"[4].

[1] George Bonnet, *De Munich à la guerre, défense de la paix*, [Paris], Plon, 1967, f. 51.

[2] *Ibidem*

[3] Ministry of Foreign Afairs Archive (A.M.A.E), Fond 71/Czechoslovakia, file no. 5 (1937-1940), p. 175.

[4] Apud *Probleme de politică externă a României 1919-1939* [Romania's Foreign Policy Topics, 1919-1939], Vol I, Editura Militară, Bucureşti, p. 315;

Second, it had become obvious that Romania could no longer honor any of its obligations towards its ally from the Little Entente, something that the authorities in Prague understood equally well, as they did not call for the help from its allies, including Romania. On September 26, 1938, just three days before the agreement of the four powers, the Romanian foreign minister, Nicolae Petrescu-Comnen, received the Czechoslovak chargé d'affaires in Bucharest, Kroupka, occasion when he noticed that "At no point during this grave crisis the Romanian government was invited to tell its point of view, while the Czechoslovak government took decision of considerable importance without remembering the mandatory provisions for the members of the Little Entente"[5].

Given that Britain and France were favoring the concession, exerting pressure on the Czechoslovak government in this respect, and that the allies from the Little Entente had reservations, any solitary attempt by Romania would have involved risks and, anyway, the chances to succeed would have been almost inexistent.

However, it is worth mentioning that the Romanian government did contact its allies in order to discuss the possible positioning towards the situation of Czechoslovakia. The reply was disappointing, the Yugoslav prime-minister, Milan Stojadinović, informing Bucharest on September 28, 1938, that, together with Ioannis Metaxas and Rüştü Aras, a conclusion was reached that a common demarche "would not be opportune at this moment. He believes it would be cautious to wait for the results of the talks in Munich"[6].

Viorica Moisuc, *România şi criza cehoslovacă. Documente. Septembrie 1938* [Romania and the Czechoslovak Crisis. Documents. September 1938], Adevărul Holding, Bucureşti, 2010, doc. no. 325, pp. 591-597.

[5] A.M.A.E., Fond 71/Czechoslovakia, file no. 41 (1937-1944), f. 378.

[6] *Ibidem*, Vol. 82 (1936-1940), f. 131.

While Romania was unable to effectively intervene in the Czechoslovak crisis, the solving of which being completely undertook by the great powers, it did manage to adopt, however, a fair conduct towards its ally. Among other things, the Romanian authorities promptly rejected the proposal of the Polish government to participate to the partition of Czechoslovakia, at the same time trying to moderate Warsaw's attitude towards its neighbor. The loyal conduct of the Romanian state was largely and frequently recognized by various Czechoslovak personalities, who praised Romania in this respect. On October 10, 1938, Nicolae Petrescu-Comnen received Ferdinand Veverka, the Czechoslovak minister in Bucharest, the latter declaring that "the Czechoslovak people will never forget Romania's services during the present crisis"[7]. On October 20, 1938, Radu Crutzescu was received by the Czechoslovak foreign minister, František Chvalkovský, who renewed "the warm thanks of the Czechoslovak government for our action. We will never forget", concluded the Czechoslovak dignitary[8].

Further signs of appreciation came not only from Prague, but also from other European capitals. On December 5, 1938, the Czechoslovak minister to Berlin told the Romanian diplomats that "Romania's loyalty represented for us the most precious moral support"[9].

But, beyond these tokens of appreciation, the perspective of future cooperation between the two countries was of great importance. Immediately after the crisis, the Czechoslovak authorities intended to continue the military cooperation with Romania. Illustrative in this respect are the proposals made on October 3, 1913, by the minister Veverka during the meeting with Nicolae Petrescu-Comnen, the Romanian minister of

[7] *Ibidem*, f. 139.
[8] *Ibidem*, Vol. 41 (1937-1934) f. 359.
[9] *Ibidem*, f. 373.

foreign affairs[10]. The Czechoslovak diplomat reiterated, among others, the availability of the Czechoslovak government to sell some of its war material, now unusable, to the Romanian government. Also, there were mentions about "*the relocation, in Romania, of a part of the Czechoslovak war industry, now unprofitable on the remaining territory* [emphasis added]". The idea to create a military industrial base of the Little Entente in Romania, respectively inside the Carpathian arc, by transferring a number of industrial units from Czechoslovakia, was not new, being first proposed in 1929 by Iuliu Maniu, the Romanian prime-minister at that time[11]. Now, the proposal was coming from the Czechoslovak authorities, but in a completely different context. Therefore, it never materialized.

Given that Romania's system of alliances received a major blow and that the international situation was murky after the "Munich episode", the only solution for the Romanian foreign policy was to "force" the rethinking of the action strategies and of its commitments towards Eastern Europe in the two allied capitals, Paris and London. In this conjuncture, the priority was to obtain firm commitments from its two Western allies in order to discourage the aggressive tendencies of Nazi Germany, which aimed far beyond the Czechoslovak borders, Romania being a potential future target.

Major trends in Romania's foreign policy

Therefore, the Munich episode shaped several major trends in the planning of Romanian foreign policy:

[10] *Ibidem*, Vol. 82 (1936-1940), f. 139.

[11] Details in Major General (ret.) Dr. Mihail E. Ionescu, *Romania's War Technology: Between Requirements and Budgetary Allotments (1920-1939)*, in „Tehnology and Warfare, 38th International Congress of Military History 25 august – 1 septembrie 2012", Sofia, Bulgaria, URCH Alma Mater/Sofia University Press, 2013, p. 248.

1. The alliance strategy developed by Romania after Versailles – subordinated to the strategy developed by the major European capitals – did not succeed to offer an efficient response to the threats posed by the Reich against the European order. From this point of view, the Munich episode represented a powerful blow to the East-European statu-quo, a central point in the Romanian system of alliances. In this respect, the assessments prepared by the military bodies, in accordance with the reports delivered by the diplomats accredited abroad, took notice of the profound impact of the Western concessions in the face of German claims. "The recent events – to quote a document from the General Staff – shook the foundations of these alliances. /…/ France and Britain were unable to oppose, while the Little Entente was passive. The Little Entente, *although formally still in existence, is actually disbanded through the amputation of Czechoslovakia* [emphasis added]"[12]. The same document claimed that Germany will not give up its plan of expansion in Central Europe, "even with the risk of an armed conflict"[13].

Regarding the fate of the Little Entente, the authorities in Prague initially intended to keep the alliance alive, even in a diminished form. Thus, on November 9, 1938, the Czechoslovak minister in Bucharest, Veverka, told the Romanian minister of foreign affairs, Nicolae Petrescu-Comnen, that "the Czechoslovak government does not wish to denounce the treaty of the Little Entente, but rather to put its political arm to sleep"[14]. Regarding the economic arm, it could go ahead by maintaining the Economic Council.

A few months later, on February 21, 1939, František Chvalkovský the Czechoslovak foreign minister, told Gheorghe Lecca that "the Czechoslovak government, taking into account

[12] Romanian Military Archives (A.M.R.), Fond 948, file 493, f. 113
[13] *Ibidem*.
[14] *Ibidem,* f. 396.

the present realities and «having to» do a different type of politics, would not consider it an unfriendly gesture if Bucharest and Belgrade considered opportune to denounce the Pact of the Little Entente"[15].

Regardless of the intentions of the two partners, the Munich episode dealt a major blow to the Little Entente, consigning it to history.

2. Under the circumstances of Germany's unrelenting expansionist and aggressive policies in Europe, the inevitability of war became increasingly present in the political calculus of the Romanian decision makers. The existing documents confirm that Bucharest correctly discerned the direction of action of the Reich, namely Eastern and South-Eastern Europe[16]. The hypothesis was validated by the fact that the states from this area were more vulnerable and did not constitute a major stake for the major powers, as it was the case of Czechoslovakia.

3. It was reiterated that Germany constituted Romania's main adversary. The western border was most threatened, given Hungary's increasingly aggressive territorial claims. As it was asserted in the document from the General Staff, dated October 27, 1938, Hungary was unlikely to act unilaterally against Romania, without having German support. On November 15, 1938, the Romanian foreign minister, Nicolae Petrescu-Comnen, told the British foreign secretary, the Viscount Edward Halifax, that the Munich agreement created "the illusion of a total overturn of the situation in Central and Eastern Europe and of a complete revision of the borders of the states created or enlarged after the war"[17]. Therefore, the direct threat came from Germany, the only power who had the necessary tools to provoke and support an act of force by Hungary in Transylvania.

[15] *Ibidem*, f. 340.

[16] *Ibidem*, Fond 333 P, file 197, f. 542

[17] A.M.A.E., Fond 71/Romania, Vol. 82 (1936-1940), f. 156.

Therefore, the "Munich episode" caused the taking into account of new elements in the foreign policy planning process and, at the same time, it allowed the elaboration of scenarios meant to facilitate the tweaking of Romania's strategies to the security dynamics from its area of interest.

The moment of March 15, 1939

Another post-Munich episode, but directly derived from it, is the moment of March 15, 1939, when Germany occupied Czechoslovakia. The significance of this act did not elude the decision makers in Bucharest, especially that Berlin did not hesitate to pressure Romania to sign an economic agreement which was synonymous with the subordination of the Romanian economy to the interests of the Reich. The German demand was perceived as an ultimatum, something that caused the immediate reaction of the authorities in Bucharest.

Two days after Germany's new act of force, whose effect was the disappearance of post-Munich Czechoslovakia, Virgil V. Tilea, the Romanian minister to London, asked insistently for a meeting with E. Halifax, the British foreign secretary. The Romanian diplomat delivered the news to the British official that the German government requested the Romanian government to be granted the monopoly over the Romanian exports, the latter having also to confine the national industrial production to the German interests and needs. On its part of the bargain, Germany would guarantee the Romanian borders. Tilea pointed that this request was very similar to an ultimatum and asked the British government to seriously analyze the measures it will take in case Romania would become the target of German aggression. The Halifax-Tilea meeting caused a stir among the decision makers in London, the British cabinet

having an emergency meeting, despite being the weekend[18]. The German act of force and the "ultimatum" given to Romania forecasted gloomy days for the British Empire – the Third Reich, now benefiting from Bulgaria's friendship, had its way open to Eastern Mediterranean.

The demarche of the Romanian minister to London was largely debated in historiography, being considered, one after another, a personal initiative of the Romanian diplomat, an act planned by the Romanian and French secret services, a "bluff" of the Romanian diplomacy, etc. The Romanian authorities distanced themselves from his act and Tilea was called back to "explain" himself. Although King Carol II "reprimanded him for the undiplomatic manner", the monarch admitted that "the effects were good and he was the one who managed to cause all the commotion"[19]. The unanimous conclusion was that the demarche of the Romanian diplomat contributed directly to the reformulation of the British foreign policy, putting an end to the policy of "appeasement" towards Germany, the apex of which being none other than the "Munich episode".

From this perspective, the "Tilea episode" is illustrative for the manner in which the Romanian authorities understood to react, namely by urgently contacting France and Britain in order to get some unilateral guarantees of support in case – a formulation intended to avoid arousing German "sensibilities" any further – another state would fall victim to the German aggression. A commitment of support and resistance from London and Paris was crucial in case of aggression by the revi-

[18] Central National Archives of History (A.N.I.C), Fond Microfilms Britain, reel 5, c. 43-62.

[19] Carol II, King of Romania, *Însemnări zilnice, 1937-1951, volumul II 13 martie - 15 decembrie 1939* [Daily Entries, 1937-1951, volume II, March 13 – December 15, 1939], ed. Nicolae Rauș, foreward by Ioan Scurtu, Editura Scripta, București, 2003, p. 53.

sionist states, given that the political calculus in Bucharest was based on the conviction that Romania was Germany's next target. In this extremely complex context, Romania attempted to diversify its strategy of response: at the same time with the ongoing diplomatic demarches in Paris and London, it initiated military measures in order to deter Hungary's aggressiveness and adopted a more conciliatory attitude towards German requests regarding an economic agreement. The latter was eventually signed on March 23, 1939, something that attenuated the tension between the Romania and the Reich[20]. It is worth mentioning that, one week later, on March 31, 1939, Romania signed an agreement with France, which stipulated the doubling of deliveries of Romanian oil products to The Hexagon.

Therefore, "the moment of March 15, 1939" was correctly understood in Bucharest as signifying an unobstructed escalation towards war, the inevitability of Reich's expansion to South-East and, at the same, the incapacity of the major Western powers to offer an efficient response to the ongoing aggressive actions.

Post-Munich scenarios

The first scenario presupposed Romania's decision to remain alongside Britain and France, the two powers guarantors of the status-quo, and to resist a potential German aggression. This orientation gained force and credibility thanks to the firm position adopted by Britain after March 15, 1939, when it decided to give up its post-Versailles appeasement policy and to commit itself to a policy of deterrence towards Germany. Fur-

[20] Andreas Hillgruber, *Hitler, Regele Carol şi Mareşalul Antonescu. Relaţiile germano-române 1938-1944* [Hitler, King Carol and Marshal Antonescu. German-Romanian Relations, 1938-1944], ed. Stelian Neagoe, Humanitas, Bucureşti, 1994, p. 63-88.

thermore, the British prime-minister, Arthur Neville Chamberlain, warned Germany to refrain from any other actions towards domination of Europe, or otherwise face the consequences. In this strategic design that started to take shape, the German attempt to dominate Romania represented a step in the larger endeavor to extend German hegemony over Central and Eastern Europe. The new British orientation materialized by offering guarantees to Poland, Greece and Romania. Also, talks were held in order to create a joint anti-German front together with the Soviet Union and France.

From Romania's perspective, the affirmation of British and French interests in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe – by offering guarantees – constituted an "umbrella" strong enough to deter a German attack in South-Eastern Europe. The Romanian authorities correctly understood the significance of Western guarantees, in the sense that a German attack on another state from Central and Eastern Europe, including Romania, would have led to a generalized European conflict. At the same time, there were fears that Romania's participation to new political commitments (such as the signing of bilateral pacts or a rapprochement towards Russia) would have exacerbated German apprehensions[21]. As a result, Romanian authorities believed that caution was needed in order to avoid irritating Germany any further.

The second scenario envisioned the preservation of several options/channels of action in the eventuality of a generalized conflict. In essence, it presupposed the affirmation of neutrality in order to keep the human and material potential intact, thus enabling Romania to use them at the decisive moment of the potential confrontation. Such a scenario started from the premise that, in case of direct confrontation, Romania would

[21] Gregoire Gafenco, *Derniers jours de l'Europe. Un voyage diplomatique en 1939*, Paris, Egloff, 1944, p. 97.

have been unable to defend against Germany, thus becoming useless to France and Britain in their war effort. Therefore, this hypothesis too was subordinated to the fundamental orientation towards France and Britain. The signing of the Soviet-German pact of August 23, 1939, and the dramatic change in the balance of power on the continent urgently imposed the reevaluation of the political calculus in Bucharest. Under the pressure of those events, on September 6, 1939, Romania declared itself neutral, the decision being taken by the Crown Council in a session that took place at the Cotroceni Palace[22].

It is obvious that Romania's initial forecasts regarding the international dynamics proved valid. It was the defeat of France in the summer of 1940 that radically altered the strategic balance on the continent and, as a result, the imperatives behind Romania's positioning. The basic elements on which Romania's foreign policy "scenarios" were conceived – namely the military invulnerability of both France and Britain and the impossibility of a Soviet-German entente – were gone. In the new context, Romania found itself completely isolated, the accommodation to the new realities on the European continent becoming the only solution for the survival of the state.

Conclusive for the orientation of the Romanian foreign policy, for the precise detection of the groups of powers in the coming generalized conflict in Europe, are the hypotheses taken into consideration by the Romanian strategists in the spring of 1939. On April 14, 1939, it was assessed that the war in Europe will start a) by an Italian-German attack against Romania and the Balkan countries; b) by a German attack against Poland (coupled or not with an aggressive action of Italy in the Balkans); c) by a German-Italian-Spanish attack against

[22] Ion Mamina, *Consilii de Coroană* [Crown Councils], Editura Enciclopedică, Bucureşti, 1997, pp.176-188.

France and French colonies[23]. Also, at a military-strategic level, the opinion was that the balance of forces in the conflict will eventually change in the detriment of the Central Powers (the German-Italian axis and its satellites), which will not be able to hold out on the long run given the huge resources of the United States and the USSR and also of the French and British colonial empires[24].

Conclusions

The agreement concluded by the four major powers in Munich induced a feeling of abandonment and isolation among the Romanian decision makers. All the foreign policy "scenarios" conceived in Bucharest before the start of the war, but also in the first year of its unfolding, shared an essential attribute, namely the reliance, above all, on the major Western powers, Britain in France, the two guarantors of the status-quo. When trust in the effectiveness of these alliances dropped, the Romanian diplomacy started working at the third option.

In fact, the Munich episode forced Romania to take into consideration the scenario of neutrality as the only viable alternative, at least in the initial stage of the war. For the decision makers in Bucharest, it had become clear that war could no longer be avoided, something that required the search for an alternative in order to assure the survival of the state.

Historical retrospective proved that political-military planning should not depend on a single scenario, regardless of the reasons invoked. Besides, international developments invalidated such calculi. In Romania's case, the direct consequences were seen in the summer and autumn of 1940, when the borders were completely redrawn.

[23] A. M.R, Fond 948 P, Section 3, file 1706, f. 31-32.
[24] *Ibidem*, f. 404.

From the aspects presented above, several important conclusions can be drawn:

1. In general lines, Romanian diplomacy, in the period just prior to the Second World War, correctly diagnosed the developments in the international landscape;

2. On the basis of the information provided by diplomats accredited abroad, Romania drafted a number of scenarios in order adapt to the new international dynamics in accordance to its supreme interest: the preservation of independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity;

3. The forecasts prepared by the Romanian foreign policy proved valid on the long term, both in what concerned the composition of the belligerent sides, but also concerning the outcome of the conflict. This was the framework in which the Romania's role and position were established;

4. The "rupture" in the foreign policy orientation from the summer of 1940 was caused exclusively by the pressure exerted by the new dynamics of force from outside Romania.

Romania's Foreign Policy from the Munich Agreements to the French-British Guarantees

Bogdan Schipor

Once the First World War had come to an end, the victorious great powers left it to France to initiate the political organization of the East-European states, first of all through the Entente, which was actually a coagulation formula of the anti-revisionist countries in the region. However, after almost two decades, the *Anschluß* and the Munich Agreement determined both France and Great Britain to sacrifice their interests in Eastern Europe, allowing Germany to expand her influence – in the first step, the economic influence – upon the states in the area[1].

But, in point of general strategy, Romania was important for the western powers, and not to them alone, due to its location near to the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits, as well as to the eastern part of the Mediterranean Basin, so that in case of a wide reaching European conflict she represented a real strategic value[2]. Furthermore, the western interest was that the Romanian oil should not fall into the hands of some potential enemies, such as Germany or the Soviet Union. Even if it may have seemed that Great Britain and France were ready to ac-

[1] Elisabeth Barker, *British Policy în South-East Europe in the Second World War*, London and Basingstoke Associated companies in New York, Dublin, Melbourne, Johannesburg and Madras, The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1976, p. 6.

[2] David Britton Funderburk, *British Policy Toward 1938-1940, a study in economic and political strategy*, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, Bucharest, 1983, pp. 13-14.

cept the expansion of the German domination over the states in South-East Europe, they had not relinquished entirely their economic interests in the area, precisely because of Romania's oil resources. In case of conflict with Germany, the access of the Third *Reich* to the Romanian oil would have made nearly useless a possible blockade and might have changed Germany out of a continental into a global power[3].

At the same time, in the late 1930s, while the outbreak of a new war was looming over Europe, Romania's role in covering and defending the Polish flank became more and more important. This meant quite a lot, since Poland, allied with France and Great Britain and with the support of Romania, could have assured the power balance in Europe and, in case of a conflict, would have forced Germany to fight on two on two fronts[4]. Under these circumstances, the alliance between Poland and Romania was becoming more than ever a very special importance. It was going to tilt the balance in spring 1939, when the collapse of Czechoslovakia, also along with a mysterious German „ultimatum" addressed to Romania, determined London to embark decisively on the continent and to extend guarantees to Poland, Greece and Romania[5].

[3] Archives of Foreign Affairs Ministry, Bucharest, (further on A.M.A.E.), Fond 71, England, Volume 40, f. 54.

[4] David Britton Funderburk, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

[5] Until then, Great Britain's refusal to join France in offering guarantees to the East-European countries (first of all Czechoslovakia, Romania, Yugoslavia and Austria) had resulted in the repeated failure of any solution of unity in an anti-German front in this part of the continent, See I. Ciupercă, *Relații Româno-franceze între 1936 și 1940 (I) [Romanian-French Relations between 1936 and 1940 (1)]*, in Universitatea „Alexandru Ioan Cuza" Iași, Facultatea de Istorie, *Istorie și conștiință. Profesorului Ion Agrigoroaiei la a 65-a aniversare*, [University „Alexandru Ioan Cuza" Iași, History College, *History and Conscience. To Professor Ion Agrigoroaiei on his 65th anniversary*], Publisher: Editura Universității „Al. I. Cuza", Iași, 2001, p. 373.

On the other hand, the dynamics of the relations between Romania and Poland developed throughout the inter-war time along an ascending line, except for a somewhat cooler stage between 1933 and 1936, caused by the concerns and suspicions generated in Bucharest both by the Polish-Hungarian closeness, and by the fact that the Warsaw diplomacy was fostering a prestigious policy, intended to place Poland in the league of the great powers and to endow her with some kind of domineering over the foreign policy orientation of other countries, including of Romania[6].

Even so, in 1938, Bucharest did not oppose Poland's control policy to Lithuania – a fact which elicited the gratitude of the Polish diplomats[7] –, but they did also express their deepest fears with regard to Warsaw's attitude towards Czechoslovakia during the time of the Sudeten crisis and to the support extended by Poland for the Hungarian territorial claims targeting Sub-Carpathian Russia[8]. The very existence of Czechoslovakia was crucial for Romania, as the army's warfare equipment was assured mainly by the defence industry in that country. Thus, the Romanian State was in a disagreeable position, as it was allied both with Poland and with Czechoslovakia within the Little Entente and it was extremely interested in maintaining both alliances.

Taking into consideration this precarious situation[9], the Polish political leaders sought to persuade the Romanian di-

[6] Nicolae Dascălu, *Relații Româno-polone în perioada interbelică (1919-1939) [Romanian-Polish Relations in the Inter-War Period (1919-1929)]*, Publisher: Editura Academiei Române, Bucharest, 1991, p. 66.

[7] Foreign Affairs Ministry, Direction of Diplomatic Archives, *România-Polonia. Relații diplomatice*, I, *1918-1939 [Romania-Poland. Diplomatic Relations,* I, *1918-1939]*, Foreword Mircea Dan Geoană, Foreign Affairs Minister of Romania, Publisher: Editura Univers Enciclopedic, Bucharest, 2003, doc. no. 93, p. 192.

[8] *Ibidem*, doc. no. 100, pp. 199-200.

[9] *Ibidem,* doc. no. 97, pp. 196-197.

plomacy that a reinforcement of the position of Hungary in Central Europe would not have endangered the integrity of the Greater Romania, but would have rather opened the way for the establishment of a block, of an alliance between Warsaw, Bucharest and Budapest, which had to restrict the German expansion in the region[10]. This is how the Poles tried to make Bucharest be interested in their plans to redesign the political map of Central Europe. This is the background against which one should consider the action of Joseph Beck, minister of foreign affairs of Poland, who, in October 1938, visited Romania, meeting in Galați King Carol II and Nicolae Petrescu Comnen, the Romanian minister of foreign affairs. On this occasion, Poland offered to mediate in the relation of Bucharest with Budapest, with the aim to reach an agreement based on which the Romanian settlements in historical Maramuresh, which until then were under Czechoslovak authority, could be integrated into the structure of Romania. Though, the Romanian partner did not consent to this offer, rejecting the Polish arguments and preferring to stay loyal to Romania's alliance with Czechoslovakia[11].

Near the end of the 1930s, the western powers began, in turn, to consider more and more seriously the possibility to establish a front or a block in Central and East Europe, capable to withstand a possible German aggression, a front that had to act not only westwards, but also along a longitudinal line, from the Baltic to the Mediterranean, so as to have Poland connected to the Balkan region[12]. Since Romania was allied to Poland

[10] *Ibidem*, doc. no. 99, pp. 198-199.

[11] *Ibidem*, doc. no. 105, pp. 203-210.

[12] It has to be pointed out that Great Britain had no intention to support the establishing in South-East Europe of a block of Slav states, set up on the backing of an alliance between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. In June 1938, the London diplomacy hinted to Romania that they were monitoring with interest the negotiations with Bulgaria and that it was to be desired that Bulgaria

and was also part of the Balkan Entente, she was going to form the central component of this political creation. However, if Romania's consent to participate in such a construction constituted an important piece of the plan, for its achievement it was crucial to have Poland's firm commitment to participate and to be involved in the defence of Romania[13]. It was not a novel idea, but the European political background had changed.

In 1938, the British policy with regard to Romania underwent substantial changes. Almost at once after the *Anschluß* of Austria, in the time of May-June 1938, we can notice an intensification of the British trading relations with Bucharest – particularly by extending loans to the Romanian importers[14] – and the sketching of a more comprehensive plan, aiming at Great Britain's political and economic involvement in the region. Therefore, the British began to put into action a programme with the primary goal to keep up a higher trade volume with Romania, so as to thwart a potential German economic monopoly[15]. For this purpose, Great Britain was even ready to accept less necessary imports, at a price level even exceeding the market price. In the long run, the main goal of this plan was the reaching of a balance of the interests of the great powers in South-East Europe[16].

All these projects, based first of all on economic mechanisms, completed the political-military plans of the western

reached an understanding with Romania, Turkey and Greece, so that these states could oppose jointly the establishment of the German domination in Central Europe and the Balkans. See A.M.A.E., Fond 71, England, Volume 40, f. 78-79. In the same circumstances there should be also considered the support Great Britain was ready to offer for an undertaking aimed to the Little Entente states coming closer to Hungary. See *Ibidem*, f. 101.

[13] Dov Lungu, *Romania and the Great Powers, 1933-1940*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 1989, p. 164.

[14] A.M.A.E., Fond 71, England, Volume 40, f. 56.

[15] *Ibidem*.

[16] David Britton Funderburk, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-16.

powers to set up an anti-German block in East and South-East Europe. From this point of view, on the complicated background of the year 1938, Romania „adjusted" much better than Poland to the western projects. On the other hand, King Carol II also thought Great Britain's position first of all as decisive for Romania both in the European politics, and in case of a major conflict on the continent[17]. However, even under these conditions, Romania had to conduct a balanced policy in the period of 1938-1939, hovering between the western, the Soviet and the German interests. This balanced position can be followed all through the Sudeten crisis in 1938, when the question was raised of the transit of Soviet assistance or military troops in support of Czechoslovakia, should this country be attacked by Germany[18].

In fact, both Romania and Poland refused to accept such transit. Their reasons, however, were not the same. Whereas Romania did not want to provoke the Germans, Poland did not accept because she harboured herself plans in relation with Czechoslovakia. They materialized in the fall of 1938 when, by cooperation with Germany, Poland obtained the long coveted Teschen region, after conclusion of the Munich Agreements.

Under these circumstances, Warsaw's interest became manifest for maintaining her alliance with Romania, just when Germany had begun to spread the idea of an independent Ukraine, in prejudice of Poland and the Soviet Union[19]. So that, although it seemed that she seemed to have been successful due to the integration of the Teschen region, Poland found out

[17] Andreas Hillgruber, *Hitler, Regele Carol şi Mareşalul Antonescu. Relaţiile germano-române 1938-1944 [Hitler, King Carol and Marshal Antonescu. German-Romanian Relations 1938-1944]*, edition and bio-bibliographic study by Stelian Neagoe, Humanitas, Bucharest, 1994, p. 57.

[18] *Ibidem*, pp. 52-53.

[19] Gheorghe Zaharia, Constantin Botoran, *op. cit.,* p. 249.

too late that she was facing a not at all favourable situation, considering that what had remained of the Czechoslovak state had fallen under German influence, undermining Poland's strategic position. At the same time, the German influence on Lithuania, Hungary and, to a smaller extent, on Romania had grown considerably after the Munich Conference, the more so that Great Britain and France seemed to give Hitler a free hand in the East of Europe[20].

Germany's plans caused concern in Bucharest, and an operative survey prepared by the Higher General Staff of the Romanian army in early 1939, pointing our that „sure enough, Germany will continue her expansion action in South-East Europe, through Poland or even over us. Consequently, an armed conflict between Germany, on the one hand, and Poland and the U.S.S.R. on the other hand, is quite easily possible, and its operations might also evolve towards our northern border to Poland and Russia"[21]. Under these circumstances, the Bucharest authorities probed out Warsaw's opinion with respect to the enlargement of the military alliance between the two countries and against an aggression from the West, so as to make it functional both in case of a German attack on Poland, and of a Hungarian attack against Romania[22]. The turn-down on the part of Poland complicated even more the political situation of the two states at the beginning of 1939.

[20] Anthony Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland 1921-1939. The Crisis of Constitutional Government*, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1972, pp. 476-477.

[21] Apud Gheorghe Zaharia, Constantin Botoran, *Politica de apărare națională a României în contextul european interbelic 1919-1939 [Romania's National Defence Policy in the inter-war European context, 1919-1939]* , Publisher: Editura Militară, Bucharest, 1981, p. 249.

[22] *Ibidem*, p. 250.

Consequently, Romania sought to obtain the support of the western powers, and in this sense it seemed that Bucharest was scoring certain points. On December 8, 1938, the British cabinet submitted in the House of Commons a bill aimed at the raising of maximum limit of credits that could be extended to foreign governments – subject to cu British government guarantee – by 25 million pounds, out of which 10 million for armament and, according to the rumours circulating in the London financial circles, a considerable part of these amounts was designed for Romania[23]. The distribution by countries of the amount of ten million pounds, intended for armament expenses, was the object of a secret memorandum of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, the Viscount Halifax, set up together with representatives of the Treasury, the *Foreign Office* and the Department of Commerce. This document provided the assignation for Romania of one million pounds and it was presented to the British government, for evaluation, on the 18th of January 1939[24].

In turn, the authorities in Bucharest had hoped to obtain at least one million pounds – as it actually happened – of this

[23] A.M.A.E., Fond 71, England, Volume 40, f. 130.

[24] In comparison, China would have received 5 million, Greece 2 million, Portugal, should it have requested, 1 million, Egypt, the same, if requested, 1 million, Irak 500,000, Afghanistan 250,000, and Iranul and Saudi Arabia 250,000. One million pounds was kept as stand-by, as the amount for which Bulgaria and Yugoslavia were considered "eligible". From this point of view, the document is enlightening for the analysis of the British interests distribution in the world in early 1939. See National Archives/ Central Historical National Archives, Bucharest (further on A.N.I.C.), Fond Microfilms England, Inventory 1085, Reel no. 5, *Cabinet 1*, 18 January 1939, f. 21. We have to mention the fact that as to the number of pages on reel no. 5, we will specify them only up to number 379, because from then on the pages are numbered again from the very beginning, starting with number 1, which can cause chaos. Therefore, we have chosen from then on to specify only the number of the meeting – for instance, *Cabinet 12* – and its date, in the hope that such a mention will be clear and precise enough.

credit and, besides, they expected London to advise them also on the kind of military orders the Romanian state would be entitled to place in Great Britain, as Romania was interested to purchase heavy air-defence artillery and warships – torpedo-boat destroyers, cutters and torpedo boats. At the same time, the Romanian government considered that only 50% of them had to be paid on the spot, and the guarantee of the British government was covering 75% of the remaining 50%, so that theoretically it was possible that a one million pound guarantee be suitable for an order of two and a half million pounds[25].

Even in this seemingly limited form, the British assistance for Romania appeared to be more and more necessary at the beginning of 1939, because the rumours relating to Germany's and Italy's future moves in East Europe grew ever more credible and alarming. Thus, on January 20, 1939, information reached Bucharest saying that Berlin and Rome had agreed upon a plan which, in its minimal version, would have determined the full neutrality of the states in Central and East Europe, which would have ensured the supply of cereals, oil and various raw materials to Germany and Italy. But in its maximum form, the plan foresaw the dissolution of the Little Entente, of the Balkan Entente and the line up Yugoslavia, Romania and Poland to the policy of the Axis powers, the result following to be that Greece and Turkey remained either isolated, or that they joined, in their turn, Germany and Italy[26].

On his part, on February 2, 1939, the Viscount Halifax tried to explore Romania's standpoint, in an audience for Virgil Viorel Tilea. The Romanian diplomat stressed one again how important was in the eyes of the Romanian government the urgent economic support from Great Britain, but he pointed out that Romania was decided to care herself for her own defence

[25] Cf. A.M.A.E., Fond 71, England, Volume 10, 1939, *Cables*, f. 3-4.
[26] *Ibidem*, Volume 40, f. 150.

in case of an attack. However, Halifax asked Tilea whether Romania was expecting the assistance of Poland and Yugoslavia, in case of a Hungarian or German attack, considering that London did not believe that these two states would have been ready to oppose Germany in order to support Romania[27]. Tilea made it clear that this subject matter was only of theoretical interest to the authorities of Bucharest, as there was no clear indication available with regard to the later development of the events. In conclusion, Halifax addressed the issue of the opportunity of a British economic mission in Romania, but Tilea stressed out the fact that he was in no position to give an immediate answer, since he had to ask Bucharest for directions in this respect. However, he agreed with Halifax on the fact that it was desirable for the economic negotiations between Romania and Germany to drag as long as possible, so as to gain time[28].

Sending a trade mission to Romania was, however, a subject of serious concern for the British government which, on February 1st, 1939, approved in principle a proposal in this respect. The London Cabinet was trying, nevertheless, to take every necessary precaution. The authorities in Bucharest had not to be informed for the time being, and the entire subject matter was to be mentioned confidentially to Berlin, in order

[27] The question was not raised arbitrarily. The British were informed not only on the fact that so far no Yugoslav or Polish assistance was very probable for Romania in case of a Hungarian or German attack, but they knew also that it was as well possible for Bulgaria to attack, in turn, Romania in the event of a Hungarian aggression. See *Ibidem*, Volume 10, 1939, *Cables*, f. 39. It is worth mentioning that, in early 1939, the British did not trust Poland at all – see also *Ibidem*, f. 44 –, and in as far as Bulgaria was concerned, they intimated constantly that they would have been very in favour of a closeness between the Balkan Entente and Sofia. See *Ibidem*, f. 47.

[28] The authorities in Bucharest were already taking measures in this respect in January-February 1939. Moreover, the exports to Germany had decreased down to 27% of the total Romanian exports. See *Ibidem*, f. 40.

to delete any suspicion on the part of the Germans[29]. Also, in early February 1939, negotiations were initiated with Bucharest, which were concluded on the 20th of February with the establishing of the joint venture *British Roumanian Corporation Limited*, about which the Romanians were sure that it could mediate for them the obtaining of long term British loans[30].

The actual shock in European politics was going to occur in March 1939, at the time of Czechoslovakia's collapse and disintegration. However, signs of this collapse had been noticeable since a longer time. Although it came as a surprise for most of the European chancelleries, the collapse of Czechoslovakia caused also a certain degree of resignation in the French and British political milieus. So that the Viscount Halifax informed the British cabinet, convened on March 15, 1939, that both the French government and the *Foreign Office* considered that neither France, nor Great Britain were in a position to really oppose to or to impact on the events in Czechoslovakia[31].

In mid-March 1939, one more development was to disturb the British political and diplomatic circles. The Romanian plenipotentiary in London, V.V. Tilea, went on the 14th of March to the *Foreign Office*, where he introduced himself as a „private person", with the intention to voice his concern with regard to the political situation in Czechoslovakia. His fears were related to the consequences which the disintegration of the Czechoslovak state would have caused in the area of Central and South-East Europe and primarily for Romania. Therefore, the Romanian minister asked the British government to raise to the rank of embassies their legations in Romania, Yugoslavia

[29] A.N.I.C., Fond Microfilms England, Inv. 1085, Reel no. 5, *Cabinet 3*, February 1, 1939, f. 108.

[30] A.M.A.E., Fond 71, England, Volume 10, 1939, *Cables*, f. 54.

[31] A.N.I.C., Fond Microfilms England, Inv. 1085, Reel no. 5, *Cabinet 11*, March 15, 1939.

and Greece and, in addition, to go public with the information concerning the dispatch to Bucharest of the British trade mission, fact that had been kept secret until then[32].

Two days later, on March 16, the Romanian minister in London went again to the *Foreign Office*, persisting in keeping his quality as a „private person", to talk again about the situation ensued following the dissolution of the Czechoslovak state. But this time V.V. Tilea mentioned to his companion, Sir Orme Sargent, state sub-secretary with the Foreign Office, the existence of certain „secret" pieces of information and „of another kind", too, held by the government in Bucharest, according to which Germany was planning for the coming months the disintegration of Romania and her changing into a protectorate, the same as for Czechoslovakia. Moreover, because the Romanian armament orders in Czechoslovakia could no longer be met, Romania wanted to know whether she could get from Great Britain a 10 million pound loan for the purchase of British made war equipment[33]. The British diplomat gave him no practical answer, but he promised that he was going to inform the State Secretary Edward Halifax, about the conversation he had had with the Romanian minister.

Next day, though, Tilea approached Halifax directly, and repeated to him what he had told Orme Sargent the day before, but adding that no longer than several day before the authorities in Bucharest had received from the German government the request of granting to Germany the monopoly of Roma-

[32] Andreas Hillgruber, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

[33] *Ibidem*, pp. 68-69. See also Gh. Buzatu, *Din istoria secretă a celui deal Doilea Război Mondial [Of the Secret History of the Second World War]*, Volume I, Publisher: Editura Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică, Bucharest, 1988, p. 13, and Rebecca Haynes, *Romanian Policy Toward Germany between 1936 and 1940*, Translation by Cristina Aboboaie, Polirom, Iaşi, 2003, p. 87.

nian exports and of restraining the Romanian industrial production in favour of the Reich, demands which seemed to the Romanian government quite similar to an ultimatum[34]. In return, emphasized Tilea, Germany was ready to offer Romania a territorial guarantee[35]. Under these new conditions, the Romanian government expressed their certainty that, should it have been possible to constitute a block formed of Poland, Romania, Greece, Turkey and Yugoslavia, with support from Great Britain and France, the situation might have been saved. Halifax did not reply, but he informed Tilea about the fact that the very day the British prime minister was going to hold a speech whereby he would send a clear warning to all those involved. In the end, however, Tilea asked whether it would not have been easier for the British cabinet to support the government in Bucharest in the attempt to reach an agreement with Warsaw in

[34] Gheorghe Pașcalău, *România și Marea Britanie. Relații politico-diplomatice 1933-1939 [Romania and Great Britain. Political-Diplomatic Relations 1933-1939]*, Publisher: Editura Albatros, Bucharest, 2001, pp. 142-143. It has to be said that most surveys dedicated to the „Tilea Case" or „Tilea Affair", as it has been dubbed, coined the idea that Tilea had spoken about a German „ultimatum" to Romania. This idea appears also in certain more recent studies, such as that of Georgiana Margareta Scurtu, *Aprilie 1939. Garanțiile anglo-franceze acordate României [April 1939. Anglo-French Guarantees Granted to Romania]*, in „Studii și materiale de istorie contemporană" [„Studies and Materials in Contemporary History"], New Series, Volume I, Bucharest, 2002, pp. 57-72. But the documents show that things had more shades and that Tilea had spoken about demands that „resembled an ultimatum" – see *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939* (further on D.B.F.P.), Edited by E.L. Woodward, M.A., F.B.A., and Rohan Butler, M.A., Assisted by Margaret Lambert, Ph.D., Third Series, Volume IV, 1939, London, His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1951, doc. no. 395, pp. 366-367, or A.N.I.C., Fond Microfilms England, Inv. 1085, Reel no. 5, *Cabinet 12*, March 18, 1939.

[35] Cf. Rebecca Haynes, *1939: The 'Tilea Affair' and the Anglo-French Guarantee*, în British-Romanian Symposium, Bucharest, New Europe College, 4-5 April 2005, *Romania and Britain: Relations and Perspectives from 1930 to the Present*, Convenors Dennis Deletant, Anca Oroveanu, Bucharest, British Council Romania, 2005, p. 79.

view of putting into practice the clauses of the bilateral treaty and in case of a German aggression, while the states parties to the Balkan Entente should provide mutual guarantees for their frontiers. Halifax refused an immediate reply, but promised that he would inform his prime minister and the entire cabinet in this respect and he stressed that a relevant official standpoint would be outlined only after learning the position of other governments with respect to this issue[36].

At any rate, it should be emphasized that, in accordance with the instructions received from Bucharest, from Grigore Gafencu, minister of foreign affairs, V.V. Tilea, the same as his correspondent in Paris, had the task to draw the attention of the British Foreign Office and the French foreign affairs ministry on the imminent danger that Europe be left with one arbitrator alone to decide in the matter of peace, security and independence of the states, namely Germany[37]. But on the morning of the 17th of March 1939, V.V. Tilea had got an anonymous call. The mysterious caller, whom Tilea had actually recognized immediately[38], asked the Romanian diplomat to note down some information about the course of the Romanian-German economic negotiations and to act accordingly[39]. It is possible that all these data had alerted Tilea and made him act somewhat excessively. He did not tell the info about the „ultimatum" to Halifax alone, instead he transmitted them also to the Reuter agency, possibly to be sure that they would have the expected

[36] D.B.F.P., Third Series, Volume IV, 1939, doc. no. 395, p. 367.

[37] Rebecca Haynes, *1939: The 'Tilea Affair' and the Anglo-French Guarantee*, p. 79.

[38] Paul D. Quinlan, *The Tilea Affair: A Further Inquiry*, în „Balkan Studies", 19,$_1$, Thessaloniki, 1978, p. 155.

[39] Gheorghe Buzatu, *România şi Marile Puteri (1939-1947) [Romania and the Great Powers (1939-1947)]*, Publisher: Editura Enciclopedică, Bucharest, 2003, pp. 38-39.

impact, namely to „wake up" the political milieus in London[40]. Therefore one may object to Tilea that he had overstepped his attributions, but one should equally take into consideration the panic that had already spread in the political and diplomatic circles in London – and not only there – pursuant to the recent events in Czechoslovakia, a fact that enhanced Tilea's alert up to the known extent. Moreover, the information supplied by the Romanian minister in London were reinforced by other data, just as alarming, transmitted to the Secretary of State for War, Sir Leslie Hore-Belisha, by the military attaché of the Romanian legation in the British capital, Gheorghe Dumitrescu[41].

On the other hand, Tilea was aware of Romania's difficult situation in the new European circumstances. Romania needed urgently financial assistance from Great Britain in order to purchase armament, but it needed also London's alignment to the endeavours of strengthening the Balkan Entente in the matter of providing the guarantee of the borders and of the territorial *status-quo* in South-East Europe. Besides, Tilea had information from British sources in connection with the concentration o a powerful Hungarian military force at the border between Hungary and Czechoslovakia and with the fact that Germany was going to make an attempt to the disintegration of Romania by means of the cause of the minorities and the Iron Guard, with the purpose to gain absolute control over the Romanian raw materials. In Tilea's view, a swift diplomatic action on the

[40] Alexandru Cretzianu, *Relapse into Bondage. Political Memoirs of a Romanian Diplomat 1918-1947*, Edited by Sherman David Spector, The Center for Romanian Studies, Iaşi, 1998, p. 110.

[41] From the studied documents we were not able to identify, unfortunately, the nature of such pieces of information, but it seems that they have existed for real. See A.N.I.C., Fond Microfilms England, Inv. 1085, Reel no. 5, *Cabinet 12*, March 18, 1939.

part of Great Britain would have ensured the elimination of the danger represented by Soviet Russia for Romania or even Moscow's support for Romania and it could have determined Poland too to extend her help to Romania, thus creating a line of resistance against Germany in the East of the continent[42].

Furthermore, although the „alert" sounded by Tilea in connection with the demands given as an ultimatum by Germany to Romania had been promptly refuted both by the Romanian government and by Sir Reginald Hoare, the British ambassador to Bucharest, was taken quite seriously by the British cabinet[43]. In any case, Germany exercised some pressure on Romania, but only of economic character, which would lead in the end to the conclusion of a trade agreement between Romania and Germany on March 23, 1939[44]. Moreover, if until the dissolution of Czechoslovakia the German economic requests were quite harsh, after that moment they had turned much more reasonable[45].

[42] All this was reported by Tilea to Bucharest, on March 17, 1939. See A.M.A.E., Fond 71, England, Volume 40, f. 166-169.

[43] A.J.P. Taylor, *Originile celui de-al doilea război mondial [Origins of the Second World War]*, Translation and notes by Lucian Leuştean, Postface by I. Ciupercă, Polirom, Iaşi, 1999, pp. 162-163.

[44] As for Romania's economic negotiations with Germany in early 1939, they had three stages. The first one went on between the 13th and the 22nd of February, when the Germans submitted a project meant for the adjustment of the Romanian economy to the needs of the *Reich* and for the establishing of German-Romanian oil industries; the second stage ran between March 10 and 15, when the Germans sought to use their pressure upon Czechoslovakia as a power argument in the negotiations with Bucharest, but the Romanians would not give in and, finally, a third stage was from March 16 to 23, which ended in signing a Romanian-German economic treaty, valid for a period of five years. See Gheorghe Buzatu, *România şi Marile Puteri (1939-1947) [Romania and the Great Powers (1939-1947)]*, p. 25.

[45] D.B.F.P., Third Series, Volume IV, 1939, doc. no. 399, p. 370. Vezi şi A.M.A.E., Fond 71, England, Volume 40, f. 171.

Still, it is a sure fact that, pursuant to Tilea's information of the 17th of March, the British reacted immediately, sending the very same day instructions to their ambassador in Paris, Sir Eric Phipps, to inform the French government about reaching an agreement with Paris before taking an official position[46].

But the next day, the news about the German ultimatum were flooding the British press[47], despite the denial on the part of the Romanian minister for foreign affairs, Grigore Gafencu, and even from Berlin, which proclaimed that Tilea's information was „pure fiction" meant, purposely, to stir up difficulties[48]. Even more, on March 18, the Romanian foreign affairs minister asked Tilea to stop communicating through official ways the news he received by private channels, since they were totally false and detrimental to both the Romanian-German negotiations, and the reputation of the entire Romanian diplomacy. But the Romanian minister in London defended his position, pointing out that his action „had awakened the public opinion to reality" and shown to the entire Anglo-Saxon world that Romania was there, ready to oppose with every means to any aggression, and his actions had arisen in Great Britain a huge wave of sympathy for the cause of Romanian[49]. More than that, in a cable dispatched on March 20, Tilea added that fact that his undertaking had determined the British authorities to urgent actions, through diplomatic, but also by governmental means, the London cabinet having reached the conclusion that Romania had to be defended[50].

Then again, the persistence of the news about the so-called „ultimatum" determined the Viscount Halifax to ask

[46] D.B.F.P., Third Series, Volume IV, 1939, doc. no. 388, p. 360.
[47] *Ibidem*, doc. no. 399, p. 369.
[48] Paul D. Quinlan, *The Tilea Affair: A Further Inquiry*, p. 156
[49] A.M.A.E., Fond 71, England, Volume 10, 1939, *Cables*, f. 107.
[50] *Ibidem*, f. 111.

Sir Alexander Cadogan, permanent under-secretary with the *Foreign Office*, to interrogate Tilea with regard to this issue[51]. Meanwhile, the Romanian minister in London had received from Gafencu clear instructions to deny point-blank the story of the „ultimatum", but Tilea voiced his strong belief in its veracity and contended that he had been notified by a private source[52] from Romania about the fact that an ultimatum had been addressed to Romania some 10 days prior to the outbreak of the Czechoslovak crisis, ultimatum rejected by the Romanian government. The fact that nothing seemed to change Tilea's opinion convinced Alexander Cadogan that it could have been possible that „there might be some truth in this whole story"[53]. Therefore, the British foreign affairs minister entrusted Sir Reginald Hoare, British ambassador in Bucharest, to try to obtain an audience with King Carol II, to ask him for a full and open statement on the precise progression of the events, and also on Romania's position and intentions in the present and future situation[54].

[51] A.N.I.C., Fond Microfilms England, Inv. 1085, Reel no. 5, *Cabinet 12*, March 18, 1939.

[52] In 1998 there were published in London the *Memoirs* of V.V. Tilea, by his descendents – Ileana Tilea (ed.), *Envoy Extraordinary: Memoirs of a Romanian Diplomat*, London, 1998 –, and there the former Romanian diplomat specified the source, until then still anonymous, of the „ultimatum". According to Tilea, the one who called him from Paris on the morning of March 17, 1939, telling him about the Romanian-German economic negotiations and about the imminence of a German ultimatum was Adrian Dumitrescu, general manager of the Malaxa works. See Ileana Tilea (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 226-227. See also Gheorghe Buzatu, *România și Marile Puteri (1939-1947) [Romania and the Great Powers (1939-1947)]*, pp. 38-39; see also Marusia Cârstea, *Din istoria relațiilor anglo-române (1936-1939) [Of the History of Anglo-Romanian Relations (1936-1939)]*, Publisher: Editura „Mica Valahie", Bucharest, 2004, pp. 155-156, or Rebecca Haynes, *Romanian Policy Toward Germany between 1936 and 1940*, pp. 88-89.

[53] D.B.F.P., Third Series, Volume IV, 1939, doc. no. 428, p. 389.

[54] *Ibidem*, doc. no. 429, p. 390.

Meanwhile, the commotion caused by this entire „ultimatum" story started to cool down. On the 18th of March, the Viscount Halifax already informed the British cabinet on the fact that Romania did not seem to be facing any more an immediate danger, but that the British government could use the created situation to reach an agreement regarding their potential attitude in case an aggression against the Romanian state would have taken place in future because, in such a case, it would have been rather difficult for Great Britain to avoid a full force involvement on the continent, in favour of Romania[55].

There were nevertheless signs enough to draw Great Britain's attention on the situation in Romania. The negotiations of the Bucharest authorities with Germany were in full progress, and the *Foreign Office* considered that, should the *Reich* succeed in its attempt to dominate Romania economically, political domination would follow almost inevitably. Under these circumstances, the consequences could have been quite serious, since nothing would have deterred Germany from expanding her influence on the Balkans and the Mediterranean, the more so as she could rely on Bulgaria's friendly attitude[56]. In such a case, Great Britain and France would no longer be able to do anything to stop Germany, as they were facing a situation similar to the one in Czechoslovakia, in September 1938. The alternative would have been Great Britain and France going to war against Germany, but this wouldn't have been either a means to stop Germany from occupying Romania. Instead, if the western powers had acquired the support of Poland and the Soviet Union, the situation would have been entirely different[57]. But London was aware that the East European states

[55] A.N.I.C., Fond Microfilms England, Inv. 1085, Reel no. 5, *Cabinet 12*, March 18, 1939.

[56] *Ibidem*.

[57] *Ibidem*.

were reserved with regard to any kind of alliance with Moscow and, in this respect, Poland was no exception. Thus, it was important for the British to see how far Warsaw was willing to go towards such an alliance, since this could have been the key to such a political and security formula[58].

So that Poland's standpoint was extremely important, particularly since Poland has concluded an alliance with Romania, but as a defensive alliance, intent precisely against an attack from the East, even if the Romanian diplomacy thought that it should apply as well in case of an attack coming from the West[59].

However, in Warsaw the response was calm and reserved. Joseph Beck, the Polish foreign affairs minister, asked Bucharest for clarifications with respect to Tilea's actions, expressing his doubts with regard to the statements of the Romanian minister in London. As for Poland's stand in case of a German aggression on Romania, the matter had to be discussed by the governments of both countries since, according to Warsaw's standpoints, the alliance between Romania and Poland was operational only in case of a Soviet attack. In any case, however, Poland remained vitally interested in any threat directed against Romania's independence, but abstained from voicing an official position prior to getting proof that Tilea's assertions were true to reality[60].

In turn, the French reacted at once. For France, Romania represented the last obstacle in the way of the triumph of the German imperialism and of the taking-over by the Reich of

[58] *Ibidem*. Poland's attitude was the more important, as it brought the awareness of the fact that the disappearance of Czechoslovakia had placed that country in a sensitive geo-strategic situation and, even more, that it had been "cheated" with respect to Slovakia. See A.M.A.E., Fond 71, England, Volume 10, 1939, *Cables*, f. 94.

[59] A.N.I.C., Fond Microfilms England, Inv. 1085, Reel no. 5, *Cabinet 12*, March 18, 1939.

[60] D.B.F.P., Third Series, Volume IV, 1939, doc. no. 400, pp. 370-371.

resources of Central and Eastern Europe, so that France declared to be ready to offer assistance to Romania in case it was subjected to a German aggression. Such assistance could be entirely functional only when France and Great Britain opposed the aggression with joint resistance, so that the French government declared it was ready to cooperate with the British in the matter of the examination of a possible common action of the two governments[61].

The British thought quite similarly. On the 20th of March they proposed the publication of a *Common Declaration*, signed by the governments of France, the Soviet Union, Poland and Great Britain, by which the parties engaged in conducting immediate conferences regarding their common resistance in case of a threat to peace and security in Europe[62]. The text of this declaration referred to the „security and political of the European states", since they considered that restricting the actions to the South-East of the continent would have determined Poland to doubt the effect of the declaration should Poland herself be subject of an attack[63].

Maybe paradoxically, the Romanian government was not certain of the opportunity of such an undertaking. Although not exposed to an immediate danger, Romania was decided for her continuous defence with her full power against aggression, but Bucharest avoided pursuing against Germany a strategy which might have been considered to be inciting. Passing

[61] *Ibidem*, doc. no. 451, pp. 410-411.

[62] *Ibidem*, doc. no. 446, p. 400.

[63] A.N.I.C., Fond Microfilms England, Inv. 1085, Reel no. 5, *Cabinet 13*, March 20, 1939. Here is the final text of the declaration: „We the undersigned hereby declare that inasmuch as peace and security in Europe are matters of common interests and concern, and since European peace and security may be affected by any action which constitutes a threat to the political independence of any European state, we have pledged ourselves immediately to consult together if it appears that any such action is being taken." Vezi *Ibidem.*

such a *Declaration* might have triggered a political and military action on the part of Berlin. Romania thought it was more appropriate that the western powers should, upon their own initiative, state as clearly as possible that fact that they would not accept new changes of the existing situation and frontiers in Europe and that they had to extend guarantees to this effect. Moreover, as a reinforcement of this guarantee, France and Great Britain should have supported consistently the armament efforts of the east-European states, including Romania; at that moment the Romanians were bereft of the possibility of getting delivered their orders placed in Czechoslovakia[64]. Practically, the immediate hopes of the Bucharest authorities were depending on the possible voting of the *Common Declaration,* which was expected to send a clear signal that Romania was of crucial importance for Great Britain and France, and this fact should facilitate the access of Bucharest to profitable western loans, in form of either cash – Romania wished to obtain 10 million pounds for armament expenses –, or armament, without inciting necessarily the hostility of Germany[65].

But, no matter what direction they chose, for both France and Great Britain, the cooperation of Poland had become crucial, both for obtaining the support of Moscow[66], and for a true support in favour of Romania[67]. In the end, the British decided to choose Poland over Moscow, as they did not trust the Soviets[68]. Nevertheless, the British were asking themselves whether they were not overrating Poland's capacity to accomplish the

[64] A.M.A.E., Fond 71, England, Volume 40, f. 181-182.

[65] *Ibidem*, f. 186-187. See also f. 188.

[66] Georges Bonnet, *Le Quai D'Orsay sous trois Républiques 1870-1961*, Paris, Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1961, p. 263.

[67] Maria Brătianu, *Roumanie 1938-1940 vue de France. Recherche dans les archives françaises*, Paris, 1996, p. 86. Vezi şi Georges Bonnet, *op. cit.*, p. 264.

[68] A.J.P. Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

commitments taken into consideration. Under such conditions, potential support had to be looked for elsewhere, and the solution seemed to be, almost inevitably, Greece and Turkey. On the other hand, should they revert to the Soviet help alternative, this clearly meant Warsaw's rejection[69].

Nonetheless, the British political leaders were aware of the fact that a unilateral declaration of unconditional support from Great Britain, with no mutual obligation from Poland, was all what the Poles wanted, but the risk of lack of a decisive measure was too high. However, the British cabinet took a precautionary measure. They were going to vote and publish a clear statement of unconditional support for Poland, but the Warsaw authorities were going to be informed about the fact that this declaration was only temporary, as it was designed to cover just the case of an immediate German threat. Besides, should it come out that the German threat was limited to Danzig alone, possibly as a copy of the annexation of the port of Memel, the British declared they were ready to defend Poland's *independence* and they did not encourage Warsaw to declare war on Germany for the Free City[70].

The declaration was published the same day, namely the 30th of March. Neville Chamberlain and Edward Halifax were giving the Polish government assurance that, in case that „in the event of any action by a European Power which clearly threatened (…) the independence of Poland, and the Polish government considered it vital to resist it with its armed forces, Her Majesty's government and the French government will at once give (Poland) all the support and assistance in its power."[71] The

[69] A.N.I.C., Fond Microfilms England, Inv. 1085, Reel no. 5, *Cabinet 15*, March 29, 1939.

[70] *Ibidem*, *Cabinet 16*, March 30, 1939.

[71] D.B.F.P., Third Series, Volume IV, 1939, doc. no. 568, p. 546. See also doc. no. 581, pp. 551-552 and no. 582, pp. 552-553. See also A.J.P. Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. 165-166.

declaration was repeated officially by the British the next day, March 31, in the House of Commons[72].

As for Romania, on April 1 (sic!), the British ambassador in Bucharest, Sir Reginald Hoare, received instructions to inform the government that Great Britain had offered guarantees to Poland alone because of the information he had on the possibility of an immediate aggression against that country. However, the government in Bucharest was assured that the scheme proposed on March 27 was still considered valid and that, therefore, the British were still awaiting Romania's standpoint in this respect[73].

But the fact that Great Britain offered guarantees to Poland alone arose the discontent of the Bucharest authorities, since they considered that Warsaw became thus the arbitrator in organizing the resistance against Germany – and not only –, in East-Europe[74]. King Carol II transmitted this viewpoint to the British ambassador, whom he received in an audience

[72] See *The British War Blue Book. Documents concerning the German-Polish relations and the outbreak of hostilities between Great Britain and Germany on September 3, 1939*, presented by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to Parliament by Command of His Majesty, s.a., doc. no. 17, p. 48.

[73] D.B.F.P., Third Series, Volume IV, 1939, doc. no. 583, p. 553. The text of this cable had been prepared and submitted to the approval of the British cabinet on the previous day, March 30, 1939. See A.N.I.C., Fond Microfilms England, Inv. 1085, Reel no. 6, *Cabinet 16*, March 30, 1939, *Annex A*, f. 182. Bu then we should also specify that certain private sources were informing the Bucharest government on the fact that Chamberlain intended to present on March 31, 1939, in the House of Commons and toward Romania a declaration similar to the one for Poland, and that the reason he had delayed it seemd to have been the lack of a reply from Bucharest to the action of March 27. The Romanian authorities believed the information and hoped that such a statement would be made Monday, April 3, 1939, because March 31 was a Friday. See A.M.A.E., Fond 71, England, Volume 10, 1939, *Cables*, f. 155-156. However, in the conferences of the British cabinet of August 30 and 31, 1939, we could not identify any decision regarding the shouldering of a declaration in favour of Romania.

[74] *Ibidem*, f. 155.

on the same day, the 1st of April 1939. However, other issues were also brought to discussion. The king declared his consent for receiving assistance from the Soviets in case of need but, because of the anti-Soviet attitude of the public opinion, he hoped that the necessary approaches would proceed as discreetly as possible. As for Poland, neither the king, nor the minister of foreign affairs, Grigore Gafencu, placed their trust in this country[75].

The authorities in Bucharest declared their consent for the plan proposed by Great Britain and France on March 27[76], but they were raising three issues. The Romanian government wanted to learn whether the British knew anything with regard to Poland's willingness to extend her alliance with Romania, so as to cover every possibility[77] (including the alternative of a Hungarian attack), in case the British government abandoned that plan if the alliance between Romania and Poland was not going to be extended and, finally, if the British support for Romania was to be maintained in case Poland relinquished her obligations to Romania[78].

The Polish government refused formally to extend *erga omnes* an alliance with Romania, despite interventions in Warsaw undertaken by the British, French and Romanian governments[79]. Consequently, the British were bound to give up

[75] D.B.F.P., Third Series, Volume IV, 1939, doc. no. 602, pp. 578-579.

[76] A.M.A.E., Fond 71, England, Volume 10, 1939, *Cables*, f. 169.

[77] On March 31, 1939, the ambassador of Poland in London informed unofficially the Romanian legation on the fact that Warsaw had wished since long ago an alliance with Romania to operate in case of both an aggression from the East and an attack from the West. This was, hoever, a unique piece of information, not confirmed in any way on official level. See *Ibidem,* Volume 40, f. 214.

[78] D.B.F.P., Third Series, Volume IV, 1939, doc. no. 603, pp. 579-580.

[79] Ion Calafeteanu, *Diplomația românească în sud-estul Europei 1938-1940 [The Romanian Diplomacy in the South-East of Europe]*, Publisher: Editura Politică, Bucharest, 1980, p. 68.

conditioning the possible assistance for Romania on extending *erga omnes* an alliance of the latter with Poland. Even more, the British were taking into account defending Romania's independence, not of her territorial integrity[80].

All these issues were going to be discussed by the British with the Polish minister of foreign affairs, Joseph Beck, during his stay in London in the time of 4-6 April 1939. The position of the Polish diplomat proved however to be inflexible in connection with the extension of the alliance with Romania. From Poland's point of view, this alliance could operate only in case of an attack from the East. Beck emphasized the fact that his country had tried very hard to bar the outbreak of a conflict between Romania and Hungary, so that extending the conditions of the alliance with Bucharest to make it operational in case of a Hungarian attack, too, would have determined Hungary to join the German camp. Under such circumstances, Poland's obligations to Romania had to be set by mutual negotiations alone, between Bucharest and Warsaw[81].

Poland's unyielding position made the British hesitate in their plans of granting assistance to Romania[82]. If until the discussions with Beck, initiated on April 4, the British government was still determined to assist Romania with all her forces in case of an aggression from Germany or other enemies[83], the

[80] *Ibidem.* A contribution to this had been also the fact that right after Great Britain had offered the guarantee for Poland, on March 31, 1939, an intensive campaign had begun in the London press in favour of the Hungarian territorial claims toward Romania, while the Hungarians were asking that o potential British guarantee for Romania be connected to the condition of corrections of the common border and were certain that this was the reason London had not offered guarantees to Romania, too, along with those for Poland. See A.M.A.E., Fond 71, England, Volume 10, 1939, *Cables*, f. 165 şi f. 173.

[81] D.B.F.P., Third Series, Volume V, doc. no. 1, p. 2.

[82] Andreas Hillgruber, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

[83] A.N.I.C., Fond Microfilms England, Inv. 1085, Reel no. 6, *Cabinet 18*, April 5, 1939, f. 209.

Polish minister of foreign affairs succeeded in convincing the London diplomats that offering guarantees for Romania was no longer necessary[84].

Thus, the British were forced to make a difficult choice, since they realized that Poland was assuming an important power role in the region, ignoring the risk and threat for her in case of a German aggression on Romania[85] and preferring, in a selfish and blind impetus, that Romania rather than Poland herself, be the first victim, a fact signalled also by Anthony Eden in a letter to Viscount Halifax on April 5, 1939[86]. Precisely this is why, in their discussions with Beck, the British insisted constantly that Romania should be party to the agreement with Poland[87]. The only concession obtained by Great Britain was limited to the last paragraph of the statement of March 6, which provided that „the above agreement shall not prevent the parties from entering into agreements with third states, in the general interest of peace strengthening"[88]. This specification was intended to cover the position and interests of Romania and Soviet Russia[89]. However, Beck promised to the British to initiate immediately discussions with Romania in order to establish the conditions of a potential Polish support in other cases, too, than an attack from the East[90].

The authorities in Bucharest followed with special interest the results of the visit in London of the Polish minister of for-

[84] D.B.F.P., Third Series, Volume V, doc. no. 9, p. 29.

[85] The British were considering the possibility that their guarantee for Poland could cause a direction change of a potential German aggression against Romania. See A.N.I.C., Fond Microfilms England, Inv. 1085, Reel no. 6, *Cabinet 18*, April 5, 1939, f. 213. See also f. 216.

[86] D.B.F.P., Third Series, Volume V, doc. no. 11, p. 36.

[87] *Ibidem*, doc. no. 16, pp. 48-49.

[88] *The British War Blue Book*, doc. no. 18, p. 49.

[89] D.B.F.P., Third Series, Volume V, doc. no. 19, p. 53.

[90] *Ibidem*, doc. no. 10, p. 36.

eign affairs, so that the Romanian minister in London was entrusted the mission to ask explanations from Alexander Cadogan about the discussions between the British and Joseph Beck. What the Romanian minister wanted to find out was whether the British guarantee referred to the independence or integrity of Poland, whether a possible British guarantee for Romania was depending on a similar guarantee given by Poland, or whether that guarantee would operate in case of no matter what aggression, either from Germany, or from the Soviet Union. Tilea stressed upon the fact that Romania's main concern was to obtain a guarantee for her territorial integrity[91], but Alexander Cadogan hinted that the first step in this direction was the need for Romania to reach a full agreement with Poland[92].

At the same time, Romania accelerated on her part the endeavours to obtain the British guarantee. Therefore, Alexandru Cretzianu, secretary-general of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bucharest, left for London in a confidential mission, in order to discuss the British proposals of March 27, and to try to persuade the British to offer guarantees for Romania, too.[93] In the discussions of the Romanian diplomat with A. Cadogan, he exposed to the latter the point of view of the government in Bucharest, which was that the alliance with Poland had to operate in case of any attack, even though the technical arrangements had been set up for the case of a potential Soviet aggression. In any case, the Romanian government wished to obtain guarantees from Great Britain, right before the conclusion of the negotiations with Poland, because Romania did not

[91] In a cable sent to the Romanian legation in London, Grigore Gafencu, Romanian foreign affairs minister, stressed upon the fact that, for Romania, the „idea of independence was taken for territorial integrity". See A.M.A.E., Fond 71, England, Volume 10, 1939, *Cables*, f. 173.

[92] D.B.F.P., Third Series, Volume V, doc. no. 30, pp. 65-66.

[93] Alexandru Cretzianu, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

believe either in the viability of the *Common Declaration*, as proposed by the British on March 20, or in Poland's influence on Hungary or other security arrangements. Crucial was only a firm guarantee on the part of Great Britain, France and possibly Poland for the integrity of Romania[94], guarantee which seemed to be simply a casual action, so as not to affect the relations of Bucharest with Germany and the Soviet Union[95].

Alexandru Cretzianu was received later on by the Viscount Halifax as well, who showed his interest in the terms of Romania's vision on the assistance of the western powers in case of a German aggression against Romania. The Romanian diplomat replied flatly. Bucharest expected, under such circumstances, a British and French attack launched in full force to the West, a direct involvement in the defence of Romania of the R.A.F. [*Royal Air Force*], both with their bomber command squadrons and with fighter planes, as well as with arms supplies for completing the requirements of the Romanian Army. But the Viscount Halifax had something totally different in mind. In his opinion, the only efficient way to support Romania was the immediate setting in place of the assistance on the part of Poland and Soviet Russia[96].

Bucharest's response and position caused concern in London, the more so as it became more obvious that Poland refused to join the plans of Great Britain towards Romania. The only version taken into account by Warsaw was to offer assistance to Romania together with Hungary. Otherwise, Poland considered that the only way to avoid a German aggression was to show Germany that in South-East Europe and the Balkans

[94] *Ibidem*, p. 114.

[95] D.B.F.P., Third Series, Volume V, doc. no. 37, pp. 74-77.

[96] Alexandru Crezianu, *Ocazia pierdută*, [*Missed Opportunity*], Preface by V. Fl. Dobrinescu, Postface by Sherman David Spector, European Institute, Iași, 1995, pp. 49-50.

there remained open the paths of peaceful understanding[97]. At the same time, Turkey refused to get involved in a comprehensive Balkan engagement, in favour of Romania inclusively, until she had not received, in her turn, well defined guarantees for her own security[98].

Under these conditions, the position of Paris with regard to the need for a guarantee for Romania proved to be decisive when Great Britain asked France to join in a guarantee for Greece, with the purpose to dishearten a possible Italian aggression. Since they could not afford a public delimitation from the French point of view[99], the British government accepted the idea of a common position, namely to offer unilateral guarantees both to Greece and to Romania[100]. The danger that such a guarantee light cause the forfeit of the leverage required to persuade Poland and Turkey to offer, on their part, similar guarantees for Greece and Romania was ignored, with the option to postpone for later the solving of these issues[101]. Consequently, on April 13, 1939, the governments of Great Britain and of France guaranteed, with a declaration, the independence of Greece and Romania, in similar terms with the guarantees offered to Poland on March 31, 1939[102].

Even under these conditions, in both Bucharest and London they were looking further on for security alternatives for Romania, but options remained scarce in this respect. In a first stage, the British considered Turkey, returning to the idea of

[97] D.B.F.P., Third Series, Volume V, doc. no. 40-41, p. 80-81.

[98] A.N.I.C., Fond Microfilms England, Inv. 1085, Reel no. 6, *Cabinet 20*, April 13, 1939, f. 287.

[99] *Ibidem*, f. 297.

[100] D.B.F.P., Third Series, Volume V, doc. no. 48 și 49, pp. 95-96.

[101] *Ibidem*, doc. no. 66, pp. 113-114.

[102] The temporary text of this declaration can be found in *Ibidem, Annex to No. 66*, pp. 115-116. The final text of the declaration is in *Ibidem*, *Note to Chapters I and II*, p. 197.

a Balkan block where this country should be a party besides Bulgaria and Romania. There were however enough obstacles in the way of such a political construction, the most obvious among them being Bulgaria's attitude. Sofia would have agreed only if Romania had made territorial concessions in her favour. Halifax discussed this question with the Romanian minister of foreign affairs, Grigore Gafencu, on April 26, 1939. The Romanian diplomat pointed out the fact that Bucharest did not rule out surrendering certain territories to Bulgaria, but considered that the timing was yet not right for such an endeavour[103]. Bucharest thought an economic involvement of Great Britain in the Balkans more appropriate, as thus Germany could have been bereft of the main mechanism that ensured the domination in the region, namely the control of the Balkan markets[104].

Hence, there remained one solution alone: help from the Soviets. The Romanian standpoint had remained also in this respect adamant. Despite the fact that the Soviet Union had declared they were ready to assist Romania in case of aggression[105], Gafencu explained the fact that Bucharest wanted to be excluded from any arrangement involving Soviet support[106]. Romania was ready to accept the support of Moscow if the war was to become a certainty, but that such support was not desirable if there was even the slightest chance for peace[107].

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[103] *Ibidem*, *Cabinet 24*, April 26, 1939, f. 55.

[104] Grigore Gafencu, *Ultimele zile ale Europei. O călătorie diplomatică întreprinsă în anul 1939 [The Last Days of Europe. A Diplomatic Voyage Made in 1939]*, Translation by Rodica Mihaela Scafeş, Preface and notes: Cornel I. Scafeş, Editura Militară, Bucharest, 1992, p. 126.

[105] A.N.I.C., Fond Microfilms England, Inv. 1085, Reel no. 6, *Cabinet 21*, April 19, 1939, f. 315.

[106] A.M.A.E., Fond 71, England, Volume 10, 1939, *Cables*, f. 237.

[107] A.N.I.C., Fond Microfilms England, Inv. 1085, Reel no. 6, *Cabinet 24*, April 26, 1939, f. 57.

The British were however aware of the fact that the guarantees offered in March and in April 1939 were not enough if not integrated in a wider system[108]. Or the reluctance of Poland and the reserve of Romania meant that Moscow's support had remained the only true possibility to bar the German expansion to the East and to give those guarantees a somewhat more consistent covering than the merely moral one. There was no actual sympathy for the Soviets to find in Great Britain, but London could realize that this was in fact the power that mattered in East Europe[109]. The direct consequence of this situation was the engagement of Great Britain and France in threesome negotiations with the Soviet Union in the spring and summer 1939. At the same time, well aware of the enlarged obligations of Great Britain pursuant to the guarantees offered on March 31 and April 13, the British prime-minister, Neville Chamberlain, announced on April 26, in the House of Commons, his decision to introduce again, even in times of peace, the compulsory military service[110].

[108] Grigore Gafencu, *op. cit.*, pp. 127-128.

[109] *Les garanties données par l'Angleterre à la Roumanie et à la Greece*, in „Völkerbund", Revue de politique internationale, Editeur: Wilhelm Schaer, Genève, 20 janvier 1940, în A.M.A.E., Fond 71, 1939, E 9, *Al Doilea Război Mondial [The Second World War]*, Vol. 2, f. 218.

[110] See *L'introduction du service obligatoire*, *Ibidem*, f. 220.

The Czechoslovak Army after the Munich Events 1938 and the Personality of General Heliodor Píka

Zlatica Zudová-Lešková

I

The Czechoslovak Army as the most important segment of the Czechoslovak armed forces whose history almost truly copied the country's heyday, success, crises and end, had prepared since mid-July 1938 under the influence of the March occupation of Austria by the Nazis an action plan for the case of war (VII), complemented by the end of August with a special version (XIII),[1] which was also fully carried out two days after the declaration of the state of alert[2] on 25 September 1938. The

[1] This resulted from the belief of Czechoslovak generals that Germany would repeat the tactics consisting of *"Angriff "* followed by *"Anschluss Österreich",* expecting that the Wehrmacht would occupy only the border regions of the Bohemian Lands. Therefore, several divisions of the Central Reserve located in Bohemia and Moravia moved to the areas of expected invasion. In this version, with reinforced units defending southern Bohemia and retreating to southern Moravia, a German attack from the north was not ignored and with the beginning of military operations the Combat Plan VII was to be implemented: to avoid crushing the Czechoslovak forces, keep the Moravian territory and stop the German attack in three retreat lines (1. Vltava – Elbe; 2. Bohemian-Moravian Highlands; 3. Little Carpathians – Javorníky Mountains). It was also planned to launch an offensive supported by the Allies and regain all occupied territories.

Pavel Šrámek, *Ve stínu Mnichova. Z historie československé armády 1932-1939* [In the shadow of Munich. From the history of Czechoslovak Army 1932-1939]. Mladá fronta, Praha 2008, p. 82.

[2] The state of alert ended on 28. 2. 1939. In 1945, however, the Czechoslovak government, referring to the uninterrupted existence of pre-Munich situation, legalized the state of alert for the whole period of war, which was not closed until 31. 12. 1945.

general mobilization, declared in the Czechoslovak Republic on 23 September 1938,[3] saw the Czechoslovak Army at the culminating and closing stage of a reorganization and modernization process that had started in 1933. With the armed forces put in general alert, impatiently expected by the population, 18 annual contingents of I Reserve and Special Reserve were mobilized as well as a part of II Reserve members (specialists). In total, 1 250 000 men were activated[4] (including 48 000 officers and 9 000 warrant officers) with a considerable military arsenal at their disposal.[5] These forces, organized in four field armies and a Supreme Command reserve, combat-ready with 14 army corps, 34 infantry divisions, 4 mobile divisions and 3 groups (each consisting of two divisions and one brigade), were supposed to be deployed mainly against Germany, and partly also against Hungary and Poland. In addition, by 23 September 1938 a total of 263 fortresses[6] and 9 632 blockhouses[7] had been

[3] Government Decree No. 183 Col. of 23 September 1938 on the declaration of the state of alert. Vol. 1938, Section 63, p. 863. See also: Robert Kvaček, *Československý rok 1938* [The Czechoslovak year 1938]. Polart, Praha 2011, p. 48.

[4] Including those who had already been recruited before mobilization.

[5] Approximately: 350 tanks, 1 050 antitank cannons, 1 350 mortars, 2 270 guns of different caliber, 1 400 airplanes (of which 900 combat planes), 230 antiaircraft machine guns and 250 antiaircraft cannons.

[6] The types "Arab" (fortified points of two lowest resistance levels) and "Říman" (fortified points of four higher resistance levels copied from the Maginot Line), namely infantry blockhouse, artillery blockhouse, artillery revolving turret, artillery observation point, mortar cupola, mortar blockhouse, entrance structure, command post. Eduard Stehlík, *Lexikon těžkých objektů čs. opevnění z let 1935 – 1939* [Dictionary of heavy Czechoslovak fortifications 1935-1939]. FORT print, Dvůr Králové nad Labem 2001. Martin Ráboň, *Králická pevnostní oblast – Miniprůvodce* [A little guide to the fortified region of Kralice]. Hradčany u Tišnova: Spolek přátel československého opevnění, Brno 2011.

[7] Type 36 (versions A-F) and type 37 (versions A-H + K1-4). Lubomír Aron eet al., *Československé opevnění 1935-38* [Czechoslovak fortifications 1935-1938]. FORTprint, Dvůr Králové nad Labem 1998.

fully constructed and partly armed. However, the Czechoslovak Army potential (with the mobilized reserves the six largest in the world), stood idle due to the acceptance of the Munich Diktat of 29 September 1938. Still, the total mobilization had proved that most of the population was ready to defend the independence of the country against a much stronger enemy even after its allies had totally betrayed it.

For 75 years there have been discussions trying to explain why the Czechoslovak soldiers obeyed the decision of their politicians and what would have happened if Czechoslovakia had failed to accept the Munich Diktat of the Powers on 30 September 1938 and had decided to defend the country against a subsequent German attack.[8] I dare say that any such discussion should primarily recognize the following facts: a) Czechoslovakia was a country in an extremely unfavorable situation, almost fully surrounded – save for a short borderline with Romania – by hostile states; b) the defense facilities had not been completed; c) the Czechoslovak Air Force was very weak; d) almost five million inhabitants of the country constituted a potential fifth column; e) a quick and direct support by the allied powers was out of question.

II

With the subsequent demobilization ordered by Army General Ludvík Krejčí, Chief of General Staff,[9] on 6 October 1938 a totally different, though equally demanding, even hectic and also crucial period in the history not only of the Czechoslovak Army, but also of the whole Czechoslovak state started. Nevertheless, even this period cannot be viewed as a period

[8] See: *www.fronta.cz/mohli-**jsme-se-v-roce**-1938-**branit***.

[9] Simultaneously from 23. 09. to 20. 12. 1938 in the position of Commander-in-Chief of the Czechoslovak armed forces.

of total military surrender only. The Czechoslovak Army, fully controlled by the country's politicians, continued fulfilling its main task: defending the country.

The process of post-Munich demobilization took place in the Bohemian Lands in four stages from 9 to 26 October 1938,[10] but due to the unsettled territorial claims by Hungary Czechoslovak troops were still deployed in Slovakia and Ruthenia and were even reinforced with two armored battalions and mechanized infantry units, supported by fighters and bombers.[11] Hungarian politicians did not hesitate to support their campaign against Czecho-Slovakia with a bloody guerilla campaign by means of which Hungarian official and voluntary armed units wished to demonstrate their power and to justify their country´s territorial claims against Czecho-Slovakia.

Responsibility for the protection of Czechoslovak borders was mostly born by the Home Guard, a centralized armed segment created in October 1936 to protect the country borders.[12]

[10] Karel Straka, *Československá armáda, pilíř obrany státu* z *let 1932 – 1939* [Czechoslovak Army, a pier of the state defense 1932-1939]. Czechoslovak Ministry of Defense ČR, Praha 2007, p. 131 ff.

[11] Late in October 1938 the Czechoslovak Army deployed against Hungary five army corps consisting of 14 infantry divisions and one mobile division, with a total of 220,000 soldiers, over 100 tanks (including the new light tank LT model 35) and 230 combat planes (mostly Avia B-534).

[12] The Home Guard (SOS) was created on 23 October 1936 (based on the Government decree No. 270/1936 Coll.) as a result of the Czechoslovak Army efforts to involve all armed segments in the protection of state borders. It included members of gendarmerie, state police, local constabularies, financial guard and army members, centrally commanded by the Ministry of the Interior, but at the time of full state of alert the command went to the Army Command. The first SOS members (in total 29,611 men, of which 6,438 financial guards and 16,582 Army reinforcements and active soldiers) were deployed on the border in the night from 20 to 21 May 1938. After 12 September, when they were deployed for the second time, they protected the border in Slovakia until May 1939 and in the Bohemian Lands until 21 De-

The first clashes of Home Guard and Czechoslovak Army members took place already in October and November 1938 in the central and eastern part of the Czecho-Slovak Republic, i.e., in the territory of Slovakia and Ruthenia. Unlike the Sudetengerman guerillas (Sudetendeutsches Freikorps),[13] the Hungarian volunteers, members of Szabadczapatok guards,[14] often attacked in larger units, such as companies and battalions, and even dared attack the system of Czechoslovak blockhouses.[15] The combats at the height 131 between Drysina and Fornoš on 11 October, four days later in the area of Šalanky and at the turn of October in the area of Kosina, where a post-office, synagogue, notary's office, mill and several houses were destroyed and afterwards, when trying to regain the lost positions also a church and school, showed quite clearly that also on the Czechoslovak part it was necessary to take resolute political steps and support its armed forces. The major clashes with honveds (members of Hungarian land forces) before the offensive in mid-March

cember 1939. For details see: Jaroslav Beneš, *Stráž obrany státu 1936-1939* [Home Guard]. FORTprint, Dvůr Králové nad Labem 2007; Radan Lášek, *Jednotka určení SOS* [Destination unit: SOS]. Codyprint, Praha 2006; Same author, *Velitelé praporů SOS* [Commanders of SOS battalions]. Codyprint, Praha 2009.

[13] Also known as Ordners (from Ordnergruppe) – a Sudetengerman paramilitary organization created in September 1938 to destabilize the situation in Czechoslovak border areas by means of armed attacks, diversionist and sabotage actions. Lucie Jarkovská, *Odplata či spravedlnost?* [Revenge or justice?]. Prostor, nakladatelství s. r. o., Praha 2008, p. 23 et seq. Werner. Röhr, *September 1938 : die Sudetendeutsche Partei und ihr Freikorps*. Organon, Berlin 2008, p. 31 et seq. Also: Detlef Brandes, *Sudetští Němci v krizovém roce 1938* [Sudeten Germans in the critical year 1938]. Argo, Praha 2012.

[14] Also known as Rongyos Gárda, paramilitary special units trained in Hungary.

[15] Petr Blahuš, *Zapomenutá válka* [Forgotten war]. In: Geografický magazín Koktejl, Vol. 3/2004, p. 110.

1939 were the battles around the orthodox New Year on 6 and 7 January in Mukachevo and Ushhorod where the Czechoslovak troops even had to deploy APCs and artillery.[16]

The Hungarian guerrilla actions in the eastern part of Czechoslovakia, Ruthenia, were also joined by Polish forces. Their special guerrilla units penetrated into the border areas to destroy telephone and power lines, bridges, roads, and also state administration offices.[17] From 28 October 1938 it was particularly the Toruň unit of Home Guard that was attacked several times, and even ambushed.[18] The battles for the Ruthenian Príslop, and primarily those at Čadca on 25 November 1938 constituted an open duel between Polish and Czechoslovak artillery and air force, and Czechoslovak troops had then to defend the country also in the Tatra Mountains.

There were also clashes at the new Czechoslovak-German border. The worst incident occurred on 19 October 1938 in Želechovice, Northern Bohemia, where the Germans uncompromisingly killed three Czechoslovak policemen and one soldier who by mistake had crossed the demarcation line. The last major post-Munich clash took place in Moravská Chrastová on 31 October 1938, where Henlein followers, supporters of the Sudetengerman Party, occupied the village defended by Czechoslovak soldiers and Home Guard members, of whom eight lost their lives in the battle.

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[16] Radan Lášek, *Jednotka určení SOS* [Destination unit: SOS]. Part Three. Codyprint, Praha 2008.

[17] The first action of this type started on 23 October 1938 with Polish guerillas attacking Czechoslovak soldiers of the 2nd Reconnaissance unit near Nižní Verecky with the aim of destroying a great railway bridge over the Latorice River.

[18] On 10 November 1938 the attackers, disguised in Czechoslovak uniforms so as to confuse the Czechoslovak Home Guard members, could capture a SOS unit of about 20 men; these returned from Poland to the Protectorate as late as March 20 1939.

Czechoslovak territory was also attacked from the air. Dozens of reports from that time mention fire at Czechoslovak reconnaissance planes, even from Hungarian territory. Even more reports are available of a violation of the Czecho-Slovak air space. The first air attack against the Czecho-Slovak territory occurred on 22 October 1938 when Hungarian fighters Fiat CR-32 fired at the reserve airfield near the village of Mimai south of Ushhorod. Very close to an open war was the post-Munich Czecho-Slovak Army on 25 October 1938. That day Hungarian fighters shot down an observation plane Letov Š-328 of the 10th Field (Observation) Flight of the VII Corps, based at the Tardošked airfield near Nové Zámky,[19] and the Czechoslovak Air Force Command asked for permission to fire at any Hungarian plane, be it a combat, sports or transport one, violating the country's air space. Even the General Staff of the Czechoslovak armed forces headed by Army General Ludvík Krejčí did not hesitate any more to appeal to Army General Jan Syrový, Prime Minister and also Defense Minister, to approve of that order. However, the situation of the late September days repeated again: the politicians decided to settle the conflict through political negotiations. As a result, it was possible to preserve peace, but at the cost of a loss of Slovakia's southern regions and of Ruthenia attached to Hungary, and a loss of lives of some two-hundred Czechoslovak soldiers and Home Guard members.[20]

The acceptance of the Munich Diktat and the Vienna Arbitration (2 November 1938) was undoubtedly a terrible dis-

[19] Pavel Minařík, Pavel Šrámek. *Československé vojenské letectvo v době vyvrcholení mnichovské krize* [Czechoslovak air force in the period of culminating Munich Crisis]. In: Historie a vojenství, Vol. LVII, No. 2, 2008, pp. 48-50.

[20] P. Šrámek, *Ve stínu Mnichova* [In the shadow of Munich], p. 98. According to other sources the number is much higher – 312. See: J. Beneš, *Stráž obrany státu 1936-1939* [Home Guard 1936-1939]), p. 301.

appointment to the Czechoslovak soldiers and to the wide Czechoslovak public as well, shocked by the order to withdraw from the defense positions in the ceded regions that were then occupied by German, Polish and (after 2 November 1938) also Hungarian troops. As a result of these unprecedented foreign political interventions in the integrity of the Czechoslovak state the demobilization of the Czechoslovak Army was completed, particularly in the eastern part of the state, and the Army returned to the peace-time organization; under the rising German pressure and owing also to the internal activities of a part of Slovakian political representation (People's Party[21]) the strength of troops and units was gradually reduced.

The new Army organization was approved by the Army Advisory Board on 19 December 1938. Three provincial military commands, five corps commands, ten division commands and two mobile division commands were planned. The peace strength of the Army was supposed not to exceed 150,000 men, with two-year military service.[22]

Due to the difficult financial situation of the state the military budget amounted to 1.5 billion crowns only. It was expected that additional funds would come from the existing financial reserve. Gradual rearmament, or rather disarmament was also planned in the form of fully disbanding the heavy artillery regiments and mountain infantry regiments, and no special units to occupy fortifications were planned because most of the blockhouses and fortresses were located in the ceded territories. Much strength reduction was planned in cavalry and infantry units; on the other hand, only minor measures of this type were to be taken in the air force, engineers and signal corps.[23]

[21] That means: members and supporters of Hlinka's People's Party (HSĽS).

[22] According to the Defense Act of 27 March 1920.

[23] P. Šrámek, *Ve stínu Mnichova* [In the shadow of Munich], p. 104.

As a result, less combat material and ammunition was needed and the excess material according to the General Staff plans was expected to be sold abroad, mostly to France and Great Britain, and also to Romania, Poland and Spain. However, Germany intervened in the negotiations about the sale of Czechoslovak military material and succeeded in achieving a unilaterally advantageous contract according to which almost all Czechoslovak heavy artillery material was sold to Germany; thus, the Nazis achieved a strategic advantage compared to its potential enemies.[24]

On 21 January 1939, however, Adolf Hitler dictated to Czechoslovak Foreign Minister František Chvalkovský resolute requirements concerning further reductions of the Czechoslovak armed forces. These requirements were strongly supported by President Emil Hácha at his meeting with General Staff top officials and with the Defense Minister, Army General Jan Syrový. Under these circumstances the Army reorganization as planned in December 1938 was now abandoned.[25] As a result, early in March 1939 the Czechoslovak Army had 90 000 men only.

After Munich, the Nazis required also some personal changes in almost all key Army positions, including the Chief of the General Staff, Army General Ludvík Krejčí, and the head of 2nd Intelligence Department, Colonel František Hájek.

Despite this situation, the General Staff top representation stated early in December 1938: "*We cannot exclude that our government sometimes at a crucial moment will become aware of all these circumstances*[26] *and that in the interest of the remote*

[24] Vladimír Karlický, *Prodej československých děl Německu v únoru 1939* [Czechoslovak guns sold to Germany in February 1939]. In: Armádní technický magazín, Vol. 1993, No. 8, pp. 23-26.

[25] P. Šrámek, *Ve stínu Mnichova.* [In the shadow of Munich], p. 108.

[26] That means acceptance of the Munich Diktat conditions, but also of the Vienna Arbitration as well as the Polish territorial claims in consequence of Munich.

future will decide to take military action against Germany, even at the cost of terrible sacrifices. We must be prepared for this possibility…"[27] In fact, the events of late September 1938 totally changed the attitude of soldiers to politics and politicians. Until that time, their apolitical attitude and consequent loyalty had been required; now, instead, there was much mistrust and also many believed that politicians were to be replaced by soldiers. It was primarily the Commander in Chief of the Czechoslovak armed forces, Army General Ludvík Krejčí, who suggested prohibiting the existing political parties and transferring their property to the state; he also advocated an exceptional position of the Army in the state.[28]

The Czechoslovak Army stood up for the integrity of the state also in the crucial days of March when soldiers intervened against the separatist politicians of Hlinka's People's Party (HSĽS) and its paramilitary Hlinka Guard members. The military operations took place from 9 to 11 March 1939 without major difficulties or incidents;[29] politically, however, the integrity of the state could not be secured by the Army any more.[30] The leading HSĽS representative, Msgr. Jozef Tiso,

[27] Vojenský ústřední archiv – Vojenský historický archiv (VÚA-VHA) Praha [Central Military Archives – Military Historical Archives Prague], Fond General Staff 1938, From an analysis made by General Staff Intelligence Dept. on 02. 12. 1938.

[28] Proposals were made to subordinate the Army directly to the President, and also to abolish the Senate and simplify the state administration where some posts would be reserved for soldiers. Professional soldiers were supposed to hold important positions in offices at different level, in embassies, and also in editing boards. In December 1938 it was also proposed to disband the existing political parties and create a new, single one under the patronage of soldiers. However, Prime Minister General Jan Syrový, in spite of being a soldier, disagreed with that suggestion, which deadened the indignation of Czechoslovak soldiers.

[29] There was shooting in Bratislava and Prešov only.

[30] For details: Zlatica Zudová-Lešková, *Výnimočný stav na Slovensku v marci 1939 a „Homolov puč"* [The state of emergency in Slovakia and the

was invited by Adolf Hitler to talks in Berlin; these led to the declaration of independence of Slovakia on 14 March 1939 and consequently to the ultimate end of the First Czechoslovak Republic. Czechoslovak troops deployed in Slovakia were ordered to keep calm and not to intervene;[31] however, Czech nationals in those units were forced, often under very sorrowful circumstances, to return to the Bohemian Lands, which crowned the real disintegration of the Army.[32] Despite these facts, in the easternmost part of Czechoslovakia, Ruthenia,[33] where Ukrainian nationalists came partly to power and which was early in the morning of 14 March 1939 invaded by the Hungarian Army, Czechoslovak soldiers under the command of General Oleg Svátek repulsed attacks from three directions, but they could not reckon with any support and eventually had to withdraw from their territory. Moreover, in the evening of the same day also German troops crossed the Czechoslovak border near the city of Ostrava. In a clash at the Czajanka Barracks in Místek several attackers were killed.[34]

With the occupation of the Bohemian Lands on 15 March 1939, the subsequent proclamation of the Protectorate of Bo-

"Homola Coup"]. In: Valerián Bystrický, Miroslav Michela, Michal Schvarc et al., Rozbitie alebo rozpad? [Destruction or disintegration?]. Veda, Bratislava 201, pp. 384-391. Also same author: *Výnimočný stav na Slovensku v marci 1939 a „Homolov puč". Z kapitol druhej republiky* [The state of emergency in Slovakia and the "Homola Coup". From the chapters of history of the Second Republic], armada.vojenstvi.cz/predvalecna/ctenari/8.htm.

[31] Military facilities, including arms and equipment were handed over to Slovakian political and military representatives, namely Jozef Tiso, Col. Ferdinand Čatloš and Štefan Haššík.

[32] Zlatica Zudová-Lešková, *Cesty k sebe. Česi v odboji na Slovensku v rokoch 1939-1943* [Ways towards each other. Czechs in the resistance movement in Slovakia 1939-1943]. Historical Institute, Praha 2009, p. 39 ff.

[33] In the autonomy period the name Carpathian Ukraine was officially used.

[34] For this problem see: http://www.zanikleobce.cz/index.php? detail= 1445221.

hemia and Moravia and the provisional three-week period of German military administration under the command of General Johannes Blaskowitz[35] the existence of Czechoslovak Army came to an end. The soldiers had to obey the order of Defense Minister J. Syrový to make no resistance whatsoever to the German troops during the occupation operations.[36] The new situation, supported by the Decree of Reichskanzler A. Hitler,[37] namely by its Article 7, paragraphs 1 and 2 stating that "*the Reich shall provide military protection to the Protectorate*", put an end to the independent Czechoslovak Army, which had to be disbanded as soon as possible.[38] The process of its liquidation in the Protectorate (in the territory of Bohemia and Moravia) was dragging until the end of December 1939. By this date the existence of the Czechoslovak military administration of the First Republic had come officially to an end.[39]

[35] Sudetengerman leader Konrad Henlein headed the Civil Administration Department of his Headquarters.

[36] František Kozák, *Smutné výročí (Okupace ČSR – bezprostřední předehra druhé světové války)* [A sad anniversary: Occupation of Czechoslovakia – an immediate prelude to World War II]). In: Vojenské rozhledy, Vol. 40, No. 1, 1999, p. 127.

[37] Published as Decree No. 75/1939 Coll. of laws et seq. on Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.

[38] Břetislav Tvarůžek, *Okupace Čech a Moravy a vojenská správa* [Occupation of Bohemia and Moravia and the military administration]. In: Historie a vojenství, Vol. 48, No. 3, 1992, p. 46, ff.

[39] Government Decree No. 317/1939 Coll. disbanding the former Czecho-Slovak defense forces. For objectivity reasons I wish to mention that the German soldiers behaved quite correctly towards the members of Czechoslovak Army under liquidation. They were ordered to salute Czechoslovak soldiers, pay respect to the Grave of Unknown Soldier at Old Town Square, and avoid any conflict. The Wehrmacht showed also serious interest in Czechoslovak officers-specialists and offered them positions in German armed forces. They were primarily interested in airmen, fortification engineers, and intelligence service workers. Understandably, the response to

My answer to the basic question of that time, often asked by both specialists and common people, namely: *"Did the Czechoslovak soldiers have to actively resist the German invasion?"* is: *"Yes, they could resist, but in their existing real strength*[40] *they had no chance of success, save for a local one."* An open question for discussion, however, has been for many years the moral accent of such active defense.

The German occupation divided the General Staff officers and generals in two groups: those who wanted to start a new mobilization and fight, and those who were more cautious and pinned their hopes on the establishment of a secret and consequent resistance organization. Czechoslovak Army members showed again radicalism, which could be later seen also both in the domestic and the foreign military resistance movement. The command of the resistance organization Obrana národa (ON, National Defense, created in the latter half of March 1939) did not conceal their intention to install a temporary military dictatorship after the liberation to prevent the prewar political situation from restoring and its representatives from returning. The Czechoslovak officers and generals going into exile were leaving the country with the same goals.

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such offers made by the occupants was mostly rather cold; no Czechoslovak soldiers accepted the offer, save for some soldiers of German nationality or wishing to be considered German.

[40] Czechoslovak armed forces concentrated in Bohemia and Moravia consisted of four army corps (two corps commands in Bohemia and two in Moravia) with a total of 13 divisions (ten infantry divisions and three mobile divisions), plus two special groups. It should be stressed, however, that the strength of these divisions was very low and their members were mostly recruits who started military service on 1 March 1939. Trained soldiers had been mostly sent from Bohemia and Moravia to Slovakia and Ruthenia. The real Army strength in the Bohemian Lands can be therefore estimated at 7 divisions only.

III

The Czechoslovak Army failed to have prepared a resistance plan for the case of internal disruption and simultaneously of German and Hungarian occupation like that of March 1939. All decisions calling to organize military resistance and fight were approved by the top resistance representatives in the latter half of March 1939 only. The network of illegal organizations, created according to the peacetime military scheme, reveals surprise, lack of caution, and even hazard. It is true, however, that the ON[41] Command had expected a quick start of war, certainly not a debacle, with the western Powers waging a campaign against Germany with the support of the clandestine force of Czechoslovak soldiers organized by the ON and continuing the tradition of pre-war Czechoslovak Army.[42]

A restoration of the Czechoslovak Army ready for battle was an ace in the political and diplomatic efforts of Czechoslovak politicians in exile from the very beginning of the war. They considered it a vis maior in the spirit of the proven tradition of

[41] The creation of an illegal army called Obrana národa (ON – National Defense) was initiated by Army General Josef Bílý, Army General Sergej Vojcechovský and Division General Sergej Ingr already by the end of March 1939, shortly after the occupation of Bohemia and Moravia by German troops. The ON was built as a secret military resistance organization of Protectorate-wide structure, from the central military command (General Staff) through two land commands (Bohemia and Moravia), provincial (corps) commands, regional (division) commands, district (regiment) commands down to the lowest levels (battalions and companies). The ultimate ON goal was to restore a democratic Czechoslovak Republic within the pre-Munich borders.

[42] Pavel Šrámek, *Československí vojáci v odboji* [Czechoslovak soldiers in the resistance movement]. In: Armádní technický magazín, Vol. 34, No. 12, 2002, pp. 41-42. Vítězslav Hanák, *Muži a radiostanice tajné války* [The secret war men and radio stations]. ELLI print, Dvůr Králové nad Labem 2002.

Czechoslovak legions during the First World War that would make it possible not only to win the forthcoming battles, but also to restore the true sovereignty of Czechoslovakia.[43] This vision was materialized primarily by groups of Czechoslovak citizens (mostly active soldiers or reservists, but also ex-service men), both men and women, leaving the country for the places where Czechoslovak units were expected to be organized, mostly to Poland, France and the Soviet Union, to Palestine under British administration, and also to Great Britain, sometimes via Romanian territory.[44] Thus, the refugees, the

[43] Its role in the second democratic resistance movement was probably best explained by the President and Commander-in-Chief of the Czechoslovak defense force (top military commander of the Czechoslovak Army [See: Provisional Constitution No. 37/18 Coll. As amended by the Act No. 271/19 Coll., § 10b. Constitutional Deed No. 121/20 Coll., §64, Art.10.]) in his speech before the State Council in London at its introductory meeting on 11 December 1940 by saying : "*No war can be won without an army; the nation must always militarily fight for its freedom.... That is why we have made every effort from the very beginning to establish a military corps, even a small one, and that is why we have welcomed with much joy every soldier coming from our country or reporting from exile... Therefore, we concentrate mainly our activities and care on our army...The army is the first carrier of the resistance flag, it is the main expression of our nation's longing for freedom, it is the first and principal symbol of state sovereignty and freedom.*" Archív Ústavu T. G. Masaryka (AÚTGM) Praha [T. G. Masaryk Institute Archive Prague], Fond 40, sign, VI/G/1, box 4 C. Edvard Beneš, *Tři roky druhé světové války* [Three years of the World War II]. London 1942, pp. 120-121. Same author: *Šest let exilu a druhé světové války* [Six years of exile and World War II]. Praha 1946, pp. 261-289.

[44] For details: Ludvík Svoboda, *Z Buzuluku do Prahy* [From Buzuluk to Prague]. Mladá fronta, Praha 1974; František Fajtl, *Bitva o Británii* [The battle of England]. Svět křídel, Cheb 1991; Eduard Čejka, *Československý odboj na Západě, díl I. a II* [Czechoslovak resistance movement in the West, Parts I and II]. Magnet-Press, Praha 1992; Jiří Rajlich, Jiří Sehnal, *Stíhači nad kanálem* [Fighters over the Channel]. Naše vojsko, Praha 1993; Jiří Rajlich, *Na nebi sladké Francie.* I. díl [In the skies of sweet France. Part I]. Ares, Praha 1998; *Československá armáda 1939-1945. Plány a skutečnost* [The Czecho-

Czechoslovak citizens living abroad, and also the conscription and mobilization of Czechoslovaks living in France (and later also in other countries of the anti-Hitler coalition) made it possible to gradually lay foundations of the *Czechoslovak defense forces* in exile consisting of the *Czechoslovak military administration*[45] and *Czechoslovak military units*.[46]

IV

One of the key personalities that rendered outstanding service to the Czechoslovak Army between the two world wars, ranked among the most important persons in the process of rebuilding the Czechoslovak armed forces abroad in the years 1939-1945 and also largely contributed to their stabilization after the war was the Czechoslovak officer (from 1943 brigadier general) Heliodor Píka, a Czechoslovak soldier, diplomat, patriot and democrat who had twice, from 1932 to 1936 and particularly in 1939-1940, close contacts to Romania.

slovak Army 1939-1945. Plans and reality]. Ed. Zlatica Zudová-Lešková. AVIS, Praha 2003; Karel Richter, P*řes krvavé řeky* [Across rivers of blood]. Ostrov, Praha 2003; Various authors, *Vojenské osobnosti československého odboje 1939-1945* [Military personalities of the Czechoslovak resistance movement 1939-1945]. AVIS, Praha 2005; Ludvík Svoboda, *Deník z doby válečné* [Wartime diary]. Mladá fronta, Praha 2008.

[45] With respect to the above state political goals it was the largest Czechoslovak exile report at all.

[46] Members of the *Czechoslovak Army* abroad were divided into a combat group (armed group) deployed in battles, and a service group (supporting group) responsible for material and other logistic services for combat units. For details: Dana Nývltová, *Čs. vojenská správa v období druhé světové války* [Czechoslovak military administration during the Second World War]. In: Historie a vojenství, No. 4, 1964, pp. 583-628; Zlatica Zudová-Lešková, *Československá armáda 1939-1945. Plány a skutočnosť* [Czechoslovak Army 1939-1945. Plans and reality]. In: Československá armáda 1939-1945 (Plány a skutečnost). Ed. Z. Zudová-Lešková. AVIS, Praha 2003, p. 24 ff.

Heliodor Píka was already in World War I[47] a member of the Czechoslovak Revolutionary Volunteer Army (Czechoslovak Army abroad)[48] in Russia where he took part in the battles of Bachmač[49] and Zborov,[50] and following his transfer to France in October 1917 he also fought in Alsace, Champagne and Aragon.[51]

In the period of unification of the newly formed Czechoslovak Army[52] he was, owing to his abilities and personal qualities, one of the first officers sent to the Company Commander School in Saint Cyr, France. In the fall of 1925 he was admitted to the Military School in Prague and, one year later in October, to the Ecole de Guerre in Paris from which he successfully graduated in September 1928. Owing to his excellent credentials obtained from the French Army Command he was appointed aide-de-camp to the Chief of the Czechoslovak Army Headquarters in Prague.[53]

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[47] By joining the 1st Czechoslovak infantry regiment of Master John Hus in June 1917.

[48] After WW I the units of military resistance abroad were called "Czechoslovak legions" and their members "legionaries".

[49] Vratislav Preclik, *Masaryk a bitva u Bachmače* [Masaryk and the battle of Bachmač]. In: ČAS (journal of Masaryk Democratic Movement), Vol. XIII, No. 68, 2005, pp. 8-11.

[50] Jan Galandauer, *2. 7. 1917: Bitva u Zborova: Česká legenda* [2. 7. 1917: The battle of Zborov: A Czech legend]. Havran, Praha 2002.

[51] Zlatica Zudová-Lešková, *Zapomenutá elita. Československí vojenští diplomaté v letech 1938-1945* [An élite fallen into oblivion. Czechoslovak military diplomats in 1938-1945]. Mladá fronta, Praha 2011, p. 177.

[52] Following an order issued by the Minister of National Defense, Václav Jaromír Klofáč, on 2.1. 1920 under Reg. No. 14.002-pres.1919, and an order issued by President Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk several days later. A legal basis of the unification of Czechoslovak armed forces was the Defense Act of 13.3.1920.

[53] On the organization of the Headquarters (later General Staff) of Czechoslovak Army see: Eduard Stehlík, *Srdce armády. Generální štáb 1919-1924* [The heart of the Army: General staff 1919-1924]. AVIS, Praha 2004, p. 11, ff.

On 31 August 1932, Heliodor Píka, already in the rank of General Staff major, became the fourth military attaché in Bucharest[54] with simultaneous accreditation for Turkey. His Romanian pendant in Prague in the same position of diplomatic representative was Lieutenant Colonel Andrei Nasta; he was replaced on 15 January 1935 by Lieutenant Colonel Ioan Eftimiu, who remained in that position until the German occupation and the downfall of Czecho-Slovakia in mid-March 1939.[55]

In view of the increased activity of fascist Italy showing some sympathy with Hungary's anti-Czechoslovak revisionism and also obvious efforts aimed at both economic and military strategic rapprochement (at the general staff level) with Romania, Píka's mission[56] became of extreme importance.

[54] The first Czechoslovak officer accredited in the post of military attaché in November 1920 was Captain Prokop Kumpošt. He was replaced in October 1922 by GS Col. Ferdinand Sylvester, and the third Czechoslovak military attaché to Bucharest was GS Lieutenant-Colonel Josef Braun (from October 1927 to August 1932).

[55] Prior to the colonels Eftimiu and Nasta, the military diplomatic office in Czechoslovakia was held as follows: in 1919-1921 by Major Lucio Victor Vecchio, who was followed for a one-year term of office by Col. Anton Iovanovici. The latter was replaced in 1923 in the position of military attaché by Lieutenant-Colonel Pastia Fotache and, after his transfer to another post in summer 1924, the office of Romanian military attaché was held for three years by Colonel Dumitriu Haralambos. In the next three-year period, from 1927 to 1930, the Romanian military interests in Prague were officially represented by Col. Aurel Racovita, who was replaced in November 1930 by the above-mentioned Lieutenant-Colonel Andrei Nasta. Dumitru Preda, Mihai Retegan, *Lista ataşaţilor militari români* (*1877-1944*). In: "Revista Arhivelor", No. 4, Bucureşti 1981. Marusia Elena Cîrstea, *Mica Înţelegere şi ataşaţii militari români la Praga şi Belgrad.* In: Revista de "Ştiinţe Politice", No. 30-31, Editura Universitaria, Craiova 2011, pp. 17-25.

[56] From 1932 to 1937, the Czechoslovak diplomatic office in Bucharest was headed by Envoy Jan Šeba. For details see: Jindřich Dejmek, *Jan Šeba – spolutvůrce Malé dohody* [Jan Šeba, a co-author of the Little Entente]. In: Dějiny a současnost, Vol. 16, No. 6, 1994, pp. 31-34. *Československá zahra-*

GS Major Píka's duties included maintaining both official and unofficial contacts with politicians, industrialists, intellectuals and, primarily, with soldiers, and he was also obliged to provide assistance in military matters to the Czechoslovak nationals living in Romania.[57] As can be proved, Major Píka successfully coped with his mission and he also showed much respect to the host country, Romania. His intelligence reports focused on the political, military and social developments in the country, particularly after January 1933 when Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany, and he also concentrated on the readiness of Romanian politicians to comply with the resolutions adopted by the Little Entente countries at their Zagreb Conference.[58] After the Czechoslovak-Soviet Treaty on mutual assistance in case of German attack signed on 16 May 1935, following the treaty between France and the Soviet Union, the Romanian territory became of extreme strategic importance

niční politika v roce 1936. Dokumenty československé zahraniční politiky [Czechoslovak foreign policy in 1936. Documents of Czechoslovak foreign policy]. Ed. Jindřich Dejmek. Vol. A/18/1, ÚMV [Institute of International Relations], Praha 2003, p. 25 ff. Ivana Koutská, *Českoslovenští diplomaté do roku 1945. Studie a dokumenty* [Czechoslovak diplomats until 1945. Studies and documents]. ÚSD [Institute of Modern History], Praha 2006. Jan Němeček, *Soumrak a úsvit československé diplomacie. 15. březen 1939 a československé zastupitelské úřady* [Twilight and dawn of Czechoslovak diplomacy. 15 March 1939 and the Czechoslovak legations]. Academia, Praha 2008.

[57] Cf.: *Československá zahraniční politika v roce 1936.* [Czechoslovak foreign policy in 1936], Vol. A/18/1, doc. No. 281, pp. 544-546. *Československá zahraniční politika v roce 1936. Dokumenty československé zahraniční politiky* [Czechoslovak foreign policy in 1936. Documents of Czechoslovak foreign policy]. Ed. Jindřich Dejmek in cooperation with Jan Němeček. Vol. A/18/2, ÚMV, Praha 2003, doc. No. 409, pp. 150 -151.

[58] The main goal was to establish contacts with the Soviet Union. This was due to the agreement signed between Poland and Germany early in 1934, but also to the Czechoslovak-French agreement on orientation to the Soviet Union concluded under these circumstances.

for Czechoslovakia and, naturally, also for the Czechoslovak military diplomat Heliodor Píka. According to the Czechoslovak-Soviet plans it was expected that the Soviet military aid to Czechoslovakia in the case of immediate threat to that country would be transferred across the Romanian territory, and it was therefore necessary to maintain very good mutual relations between Czechoslovakia and Romania and, at the same time, the Little Entente contacts with Romanian politicians and generals. Heliodor Píka largely strengthened the Czechoslovak-Romanian alliance in economic and financial matters with his numerous talks concerning the unification of armament and, in that connection, the deliveries of Czechoslovak arms to the Romanian Army.[59]

After returning from his diplomatic Bucharest mission Heliodor Píka, in the meantime promoted to General Staff colonel, was appointed head of the C 1 Group at the National Defense General Secretariat that was responsible for the cooperation of the Czechoslovak arms industry with the Little Entente countries.

The Czechoslovak government expected Romania, particularly during the critical September days of 1938, to supply the country primarily with fuels, raw materials and foodstuffs. This expectation would have acquired strategic significance in the case of open military conflict. To that end, a delegation consisting of representatives of the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of National Defense and the Czechoslovak National Bank, arrived in Bucharest on 24 September 1938 and it certainly is no surprise that the Czechoslovak military interests were advocated again by GS Col. Heliodor Píka. At the initial talks Romania agreed with the imports required by Czechoslovakia; in return, however, new armament deliveries to help defend Romania were expected on the Romanian part.

[59] *Československá zahraniční politika v roce 1936,* [Czechoslovak foreign policy in 1936], Vol. A/18/1, doc. No., 151, pp. 306-307.

While the delegation was negotiating in Bucharest, the Munich Agreement was signed. This fact changed the character of the following talks and Romania showed increased interest in purchasing new Czechoslovak military material or its surplus items. For this purpose GS Col. Píka visited Bucharest again in February 1939, but he also went to London and Paris early in March 1939.

GS Col. Heliodor Píka ranked among a group of Czechoslovak senior officers who always stood up for active fight against Germany (as well as against Hungary or anybody else threatening the sovereignty of Czechoslovakia), and when this effort failed, he left again secretly for Bucharest late in March 1939 in order to organize a second Czechoslovak resistance movement abroad. As of April 1939, following Dr Edvard Beneš's personal instruction, he - in the position of Czechoslovak military attaché - started building an organizational and intelligence base of the Czechoslovak resistance movement with activities covering all the Balkans with additional centers also in Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey. However, his resistance activities, summarized in five points,[60] went beyond the territorial limits of the Balkans. His intelligence organization controlled also his motherland, as well as Poland, Hungary and the Soviet Union. This territorial range derived not only from the existing military and political situation in Europe, but also from the interests that the Czechoslovak military diplomats necessarily preferred in order to maintain and develop the Czechoslovak resistance action. Under the given circumstances GS Colonel

[60] "*1 - to inform official and public political officials, editors and friends; 2 – to establish and maintain friendly relations to and interest of influential personalities; 3 – to prepare propaganda material for public action; 4 – to prepare the formation of Czechoslovak troops in case of war; 5 – to feed the refugees.*" AÚTGM Praha, Fond 40, sign. IV /32/18b-2 file, box No. 373, letter of GS Col. H. Píka to Dr. E. Beneš dated 12. 07. 1939, p. 1.

Píka immediately and deliberately took a position that was undoubtedly of great political and intelligence significance, but in practice it was necessary to cope primarily with the matters related to the Czechoslovak refugees: *"In co-operation with the French legations to Hungary and Romania he organized escape ways for them from the Hungarian territory to Romania and secured their accommodation, boarding, money and passports for further travel to France. Thanks to co-operation with the Romanian friends he succeeded in coping with this task."*[61] GS Colonel Píka was undoubtedly not only an excellent diplomat, but also a very good tactician who was able in spite of all obstacles to secure the action both financially and materially. In his position of member of the board of directors of Brno's Zbrojovka Works in Romania (which was to change following the protests of German diplomats, particularly of the German envoy Wilhelm Fabricius) he could support the existence of several refugees, both officers and common people, and was also able to support with considerable amounts of money our (Czechoslovak) resistance activities both in France and in Poland; he also intended to continue doing so in Yugoslavia.[62]

GS Colonel Píka gave assistance to Czechoslovak Jews and to the Jewish population in general. In mid-September 1939 he already reported to Paris that of the Czechoslovak refugees who were coming to Romania mostly by rescue ships on the Danube and who were interned in one of the Jewish refugee

[61] Karel Richter, Antonín Benčik, *Kdo byl generál Píka. Portrét čs. vojáka diplomata* [Who was General Píka. A portrait of Czechoslovak soldier and diplomat]. Publishing house Doplněk, Brno 1997, p. 52.

[62] AÚTGM Praha, Fond 40, sign. IV/32/18b – 2 file, box No. 373, letter of GS Col. H. Píka to Dr. E. Beneš dated 12. 07. 1939, p. 2; letter of GS Col. H. Píka to Dr. E. Beneš dated 15. 09. 1939, p. 3; enclosure to the letter of GS Col. H. Píka to E. Beneš dated 29. 10. 1939, part Zprávy z Jugoslávie [Reports from Yugoslavia].

camps in the vicinity of the main port of Constanța *"52 Jews volunteered for the military service".* The representative's report mentioned also some facts that proved to be significant during the whole period of war for the fleeing and totally persecuted Jews and their resistance movement: *"There are people among them without documents and without nationality, and most of them do not speech Czech,"* and he asked for instructions how to further proceed.[63]

The Czechoslovak military representative also encouraged the members of Czechoslovak colony living in Romania to provide help and show responsibility, particularly in the care of refugees, mostly members of the Czech and Slovak Legion who had fought in Poland and fled to the Romanian territory after their retreat before the German Army.[64] He did not conceal the fact that he could develop his initiatives owing to silent support from top Romanian officials: on 14 September 1939, Foreign Minister Gregore Gafencu "*promised me his full support within his limits and under due discretion. He will silently support the evacuation of our people from Poland, but he advises us to divide them in smaller groups located in eastern Romania (so that they cannot be seen in Bucharest) where they will wait for the ship to take them to France*".[65] In spite of repeated German protests he succeeded in obtaining support of his activities from the Romanian government, which had accepted him fully as an unofficial representative of the Czechoslovak resistance movement on condition that he did not engage in any political activity.

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[63] *Ibid.*, letter from GS Col. H. Píka to E. Beneš dated 15. 09. 1939, p. 4.

[64] For details see also: Ludvík Svoboda, *Deník z doby válečné* [The wartime diary], p. 102 ff.

[65] AÚTGM Praha, Fond 40, sign. IV/32/18b – 2 file, box No. 373, letter from GS Col. H. Píka to E. Beneš dated 15. 09. 1939, p. 2. On the question of Píka's initiatives in this respect – for details see: Z. Zudová-Lešková, *Zapomenutá elita* [An élite fallen into oblivion], p. 89 ff.

An important chapter of Píka's diplomacy consists in his initiatives to evacuate from Romania the technicians of Czechoslovak arms factories in the latter half of 1940. He also considered with much professional background the possibility of organizing a Czechoslovak military unit in Romania. As a soldier he knew that Czechoslovak nationals could create just a symbolical unit only, just due to the limited quantity of armaments to be received from Romanian sources,[66] but as an experienced diplomat he wanted the unit *"to be recognized as part of the army of an independent war-waging state"*[67] and thus make the Romanian politicians unambiguously support the recognition of the Czechoslovak government in exile, staying in London and headed by Dr Edvard Beneš. Anyway, as a military practitioner with large professional background he had no doubt that Romania as a Little Entente ex-ally of Czechoslovakia was ready, if need be, to sacrifice its proclaimed neutrality for the sake of the Czechoslovaks.[68]

GS Colonel Píka and his close collaborator, Ing. Lev Klučka, controlled from his Bucharest apartment in No. 10, Strada Andrei Muresanu, a large network of informers and he continued maintaining his contacts and communication with Romanian ministers aimed at recognizing the Czechoslovak political activities represented by President Beneš in Great Britain, but his messages sent to London were rather skeptical, primarily due to the complicated international situation of Romania.[69] Of great importance were also Píka's activities that were sup-

[66] AÚTGM Praha, Fond 40, sign. IV/32/18b – 2 file, box No. 373, letter of GS Col. H. Píka to E. Beneš dated 15. 09. 1939, p. 2.

[67] *Ibid.*

[68] *Ibid.*, letter from GS Col. H. Píka to E. Beneš dated 12. 7. 1939, p. 2; letter from GS Col. H. Píka to E. Beneš dated 15. 09. 1939, p. 3.

[69] *Ibid.*, Fond Radiodepeše [Radio messages], sign. 8/4, box No. 36, DORA (GS Col. H. Píka to London) dated 20. 08. 1940.

ported after 21 September 1939 by his deputy, GS Lieutenant Colonel Prokop Kumpošt, and were aimed at making Romania comply with its obligations towards the Bohemian Lands (at that time already the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia) that the Germans tried to annul and gain for themselves, particularly as to the imports of petroleum and supplies of agricultural and animal products to the occupied country. Although the eventual agreement signed on 29 September 1939 was in favor of Germany, GS Colonel Píka took steps to delay and sabotage its implementation, being primarily supported by Dumitru (Mitiță) Constantinescu, Governor of the Romanian National Bank and Minister of Economy,[70] and after the establishment of the Ministry of Foreign Trade early in February 1940 also by its head, Minister Ion Șerban Christu.[71]

Czechoslovak special representative to Romania, GS Colonel Píka, did not conceal as of 22 February 1940 in his reports his worries about the fate of his host country and the threat to it from outside: "*There is a serious danger of invasion to Romania. Germany does not believe Romania, does not know the plans of Russia, and will probably want to secure its supplies from territories as far as the Black Sea, namely the Danube River as a major transportation route before it is strongly tied to the West.... On the Russian side preparations are undoubtedly made for an invasion to Romania, irrespective of the German preparations and maybe even against Germany's will...*".

[70] *Ibid.*, Fond 40, sign. IV /32/18b-2 file, box No. 373, letter from GS Col. H. Píka to Dr. E. Beneš dated 10. 10. 1939, p. 8. Also Píka's *Zpráva o hospodářských jednáních německo-rumunských* [Report on German-Romanian economic negotiations] of 27. 11. 1939, letter of GS Col. H. Píka to the Czechoslovak National Committee (Čs. NV) in Paris dated 01. 01. 1940; *Hospodářská zpráva z Rumunska z 1. ledna 1940* [Economic report from Romania of 1 January 1940], and other reports from 1940.

[71] *Ibid.*, report of GS Col. H. Píka *Povšechná situace v Rumunsku* [General situation in Romania] dated 18. 02. 1940, p. 4.

He also pointed to the Nazi penetration into the country in a "peaceful" way: *"The government has resisted for a long time, but this week (*second week in March – author's remark) *it has granted the conditions of the Iron Guard, namely annulment of the measures against the Guardsmen, amnesty, moral rehabilitation of executed persons, return to positions, etc. Under these conditions the Iron Guard leaders will call upon their followers to fuse with the current political regime. ... The Guardsmen who have fled to Germany (some 260 people) are allowed to return to their country and their impunity and safety is guaranteed."* The radicalization of situation had an immediate impact also on Píka's activities. *"Under the German pressure, Romania ordered a severe control of Czechs and Poles. It is no more allowed to issue permits of stay in Romania to the persons having a Czechoslovak passport. The Minister of the Interior has promised me his assistance in individual cases, according to my suggestion. He refused to issue general permits."*[72] As a result, Píka's position in Romania had become illegal as of 1 January 1940, although his stay was still tolerated by the Romanian authorities,[73] formally on the basis of a "*Carte blanche*" and as of 18 March of the same year of a special permit; he was even allowed to wear a gun.[74]

[72] *Ibid.*, letter from GS Col. H. Píka to Čs. NV VS of 22. 2. 1940. On the situation see also: *Ibid.*, Fond 40, sign. IV /32/18b–1 file, box No. 373, report of GS Col. H. Píka *Povšechná situace v Rumunsku* [General situation in Romania] dated 17. 3. 1940, pp. 2–3, 6–8.

[73] *Od rozpadu Česko – Slovenska do uznání československé prozatímní vlády 1939–1940. Dokumenty československé zahraniční politiky* [From the disintegration of Czecho-Slovakia to the recognition of the Czechoslovak Provisional Government 1939-1940. Documents of Czechoslovak foreign policy]. Vol. B/1. Eds. Jan Němeček, Jan Kuklík, Helena Nováčková, Ivan Šťovíček. ÚMV, Praha 2002, doc. No. 233, pp. 486-487.

[74] AÚTGM Praha, Fond. 40, sign. IV /32/18b-1 file, box No. 373, letter from GS Col. H. Píka to Čs. NV dated 04. 05. 1940, pp. 1-2.

The situation in Romania, like that in all the Balkans, which had become an instrument of comparing the forces and tactics of the two allies and enemies at the same time, Germany and Russia, was considered by the special representative of Czechoslovakia as of March 1940 to be rather sad, and although he did not expect any acute danger of direct military conflict for the time being, he took further steps in his intelligence activities and also in helping Czechoslovak nationals, namely the Czechoslovak technicians working in the arms factory of Cugir, including the director Ing. Josef Martinásek.[75]

In Píka's messages reports can be naturally found that reflect the opinion of Romanian politicians and journalists concerning the situation in ex-Czechoslovakia and that also describe the activities of Czechoslovak politicians and soldiers in exile, particularly in France and Great Britain. In his report of 17 March 1940 to the Czechoslovak National Committee in Paris he explained the Romanian views at the first anniversary of the Nazi occupation of Bohemia and Moravia as follows: *"The newspaper Jurnalul remembered on 15 March the anniversary of occupation of Bohemia and Moravia. The editorial recapitulated the sequence of the then events, recalled Hitler's speeches, and also reminded the reader of the response to those events in the West. The article is closed with following conclusion: 'It cannot be excluded that a future historian examining the events of the 15 March 1939 will be able to state that the events of that day have changed the appearance of the whole world.'"*[76]

On 4 July 1940 Ion Gigurtu put himself at the head of the Romanian state, and already thirteen days later GS Col. Píka

[75] *Ibid.*, letter from GS Col. H. Píka to Čs. NV dated 14. 04 1940, p. 8; letter from GS Col. H. Píka to Čs. NV dated 19. 04. 1940, pp. 1-2.

[76] *Ibid.*, letter from GS Col. H. Píka to Čs. NV dated 17. 03. 1940, p. 4.

sent to London a message reporting a rapid deterioration of the situation in the country, but also declaring that he was not obliged to leave Bucharest and did not intend to do so, either; in fact, he was encouraged to stay by the Prime Minister, who issued him a permit to further stay in the country, and even *"the Soviet envoy* [Anatolij J. Lavrentiev] *advices me to stay and asks for co-operation in the information area. Please let me know your decision in this matter."*[77]

Píka's position was recognized also by the next Prime Minister, General Ion Victor Antonescu, commander of the fascist Iron Guard, who assumed his office on 5 September 1940. Antonescu asked personally Píka and his group to refrain from any political activity. "*As far as our government in London is concerned, he requires that its existence be not notified officially because he cannot recognize it. This would cause problems with the Axis.*"[78]

From the above logically follows the question what makes GS Colonel Píka deserve so much attention and exceptions on the part of Romanian top politicians, even those who were pro-German and authoritarian-oriented. The reason may have been the declining Little Entente alliance and friendship, or perhaps the wish to smoothly accomplish all deliveries of military nature, of which most had already been sealed in the years 1935–1937. These facts were certainly important, but GS Col. Píka was for the Romanians (but also for the British, French

[77] *Ibid.*, Fond 40, sign. IV /32/18a, radio message from Bucharest to London, 17. 07. 1940.

[78] Report from DORA (code-name of GS Col. H. Píka) to London dated 26. 09. 1940. *Od uznání československé prozatímní vlády do vyhlášení válečného stavu Německu 1940 – 1941. Dokumenty československé zahraniční politiky* [From the recognition of Czechoslovak Provisional Government to the declaration of war to Germany 1940-1941. Documents of Czechoslovak foreign policy]. , Vol. B/2/1, Eds. Jan Němeček, Jan Kuklík, Helena Nováčková, Ivan Šťovíček. ÚMV, Praha 2006, doc. No. 57, p. 140.

and Russian ambassadors) an important partner in intelligence matters, primarily in relation to the regions affected by Nazi occupation. There was no doubt that he was a well-informed and highly intelligent officer who not only had a wide range of sources, but was also able to perfectly evaluate the available data and to make universal deductions. Píka could convince the Romanians of this several times, for instance in his report of late April 1940 saying: *"The Germans plan to launch between the 5 and 15 May, depending on the weather, a crushing offensive against the Maginot Line. They will try to achieve a breakthrough in two places. Nevertheless, this information may be intended to camouflage an action in the Balkans. The allied legations have been informed thereof today. Dora."*[79] He was also able to correctly assess the information from the other side and was therefore informed about the Russian interests in Romania not only in relation to the territory of Bessarabia. Many did not know, however, that he was a brave man for whom patriotism was of utmost value.

The last days of stay of the Czechoslovak military representative in Romania were quite hectic. There is no doubt that the situation in Romania did not surprise GS Col. Píka; the contrary was true. However, in spite of numerous warnings he decided to continue his mission, particularly to help people who had to stay in Romania. On the 9 October, however, he already informed Istanbul and Jerusalem that he and his team would arrive six days later at the Turkish metropolis,[80]

[79] AU TGM Praha, Fond 40, sign. IV /32/18a, box No. 373, radio messages from Bucharest to London, 30. 04. and 01. 05. 1940. Next day Dora – GS Col. Píka – specified: "*The offensive will start with preliminary artillery bombardment 68 hours. Nose-dive air attacks against fortresses. Allegedly unprecedented intensity of attack. Germans reckon with half a million dead and a loss of 80% airplanes.*"

[80] L. Svoboda, *Deník z doby válečné* [The wartime diary], p. 145.

which he then really did in spite of the fact that on 12 October 1940 he was arrested following the adoption of severe internal measures and due to the expected arrival of German troops. Nevertheless, after an intervention by the Minister of the Interior, Constantin Petropicescu, he was soon released. On the eve of 14 October GS Col. Píka, GS Lieut. Col. Kumpošt and Ing. Klučka left Romania.

One day later he assumed the same post, namely that of Czechoslovak military representative, in Istanbul, Turkey. Five months after that he was entrusted by President Dr Edvard Beneš with the same tasks in the same position in Moscow, where he arrived on 26 April 1941, and he was recognized by the Soviet side also as a representative of the Czechoslovak London government in exile.[81] On 2 August 1941 he became head of the Czechoslovak military mission to the USSR,[82] the largest Czechoslovak military mission in World War II as to its staffing and scope of activities, whose work came to an end in August 1945.[83] Thus, the most difficult and no less important period of life started for General Heliodor Píka,[84] who was bearing primary responsibility for the organization and combat activities of the 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps in the USSR, the largest Czechoslovak military unit ever in World War II as to its size, period of campaign and number of direct battle missions.

Despite his outstanding human qualities, intellectual capacities, professional military erudition, knowledge of languag-

[81] AÚTGM Praha, Fond Radiodepeše [Radio messages] 8/7, box No. 36, E. Beneš, Gen. Sergej Ingr to GS Col. Heliodor Píka, 07. 04. 1941.

[82] Upon request of Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs he was formally accepted at the protocol level as a military attaché although he was officially appointed later, in June 1942.

[83] For details: Z. Zudová-Lešková, Zapomenutá elita [An élite fallen into oblivion], p. 175 ff.

[84] In 1943 promoted to the rank of brigadier general.

es, his undisputed contribution to the restoration of Czechoslovak Army and subsequently of the Czechoslovak state, the Communist government that came to power late in February 1948 needed less than ten months to degrade this Czechoslovak patriot politically, civically and militarily, and eventually to accuse him of high treason, condemn to death, and execute on 21 June 1949.[85]

On that day a crime was committed that has been a shameful scar in the history of the Czechoslovak Army, an act whose tragic nature has cast shadow over the little researched activities of this outstanding man, soldier and diplomat who in the most difficult times of his country stuck to his promise (quoted from his letter to President Dr Edvard Beneš, Bucharest, 12 July 1939): "*I thank you, Mr. President, for your great confidence by entrusting me with the leadership of our mission in Romania. Your trust obliges me to dedicate my life to the fight for a better future of our nation and I promise you that I shall not stop until the sovereignty of our state has been restored and the injustice done to our nation has been redressed.*"[86]

The fate of General Heliodor Píka is not the sole tragic soldier story in the postwar history of the Czechoslovak Army and Czechoslovak state.[87] Nevertheless, I declare with full re-

[85] Karel Jiřík, *Poslední dopis generála Heliodora Píky před popravou - jedné z prvních obětí stalinských represí u nás* [Last letter before execution of General Heliodor Píka, one of the first victims of Stalinist repressions in our country]. In: Vlastivědné listy Slezska a severní Moravy: časopis pro dějiny, umění, přírodu a dnešek, Vol. 16, No. 2, 1990, pp. 4-7. Rastislav Vahala, *Smrt generála* [The death of a general]. Melantrich, Praha 1992.

[86] AÚTGM Praha, Fond 40, sign. IV /32/18b-2 file, box No. 373, letter of GS Col. H. Píka to Dr. E. Beneš dated 12. 07. 1939, p. 1. Also: *Od rozpadu Československa do uznáni československé prozatímní vlády 1939-1940* [From the disintegration of Czechoslovakia to the recognition of Czechoslovak Provisional Government 1939-1940], Vol. B/1, doc. No. 56, pp. 153–155.

[87] Jan Bret, *22 oprátek* [22 nooses]. AVIS, Praha 1999.

sponsibility that I consider his fate a tragic culmination of the fate of the whole Czechoslovak Army that started with the unprecedented Nazi attack against the Czechoslovak Republic in 1938.[88]

[88] In the above quoted archival sources following code-names are used, namely: BETINKA S KOLEBKOU – transmitter in Bucharest; BOB (Barbora-Oldřich-Barbora) – danger of bombardment! BRUČOUN – Warrant Officer Class 2 Karel Broukal; DORA – Czechoslovak military intelligence base in Bucharest, also transmitter, also GS Lieut. Col. Heliodor Píka; HELA – GS Col. Heliodor Píka; IVO – Second Lieutenant Jaromír Šebesta; JARMA (also KONAROVÁ) – wife of GS Col. Prokop Kumpošt; KONAR – GS Col. Prokop Kumpošt; LEV – First Lieutenant Josef Chrástný; MARIE – Czechoslovak military intelligence base in Warsaw as of April 1939, and in Belgrade as of January 1940; MILAN – GS Col. Heliodor Píka; MLÁTIČKY – transmitters, wireless telegraph stations; MORA – GS Col. František Moravec; MUSIL – GS Col. František Moravec; NAVRÁTIL – Dr. Edvard Beneš; PLANTA (too LEV) – Ing. Lev Klučka; PROKOP – GS Col. Prokop Kumpošt; SMUTNÝ - STOJ – Col. František Hieke; SVATOPLUK – Gen. Sergej Ingr; ŠÍP – Vladimír Krajina; VALAŠSKO – Romania.

The Munich Agreement and the Process of its Repudiation[1]

Jan Němeček

Late at night on 29 September 1938 the fate of Czechoslovakia was sealed. The many months of heavy German pressure in all areas that the representatives of Great Britain and France had been yielding to in line with their policy of appeasement eventually culminated at a meeting of the Four Powers, namely Germany, Italy, Great Britain and France, while representatives of the country in question, Czechoslovakia, were not allowed to attend. Representatives of the democratic powers, French Premier Édouard Daladier and British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, accepted at the conference held in Munich the text of what is known as Munich Agreement on the cession of Czechoslovak border areas to Germany. The document determined the main features of the process, namely the four zones of ceded land, anticipated the right of option for the local population and, last but not least, contained in its supplement an international guarantee of the new Czechoslovak border in case of unprovoked attack. Another additional declaration stated that if an agreement on the Polish and Hungarian minorities in Czechoslovakia had not been reached within three months the problem would be discussed and resolved at another meeting of the Signatories. The final size of the ceded land, however, including the last – fifth – cession zone was not defined by the Munich Agreement, but was supposed to be de-

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limited in the forthcoming period of time by an international committee consisting of representatives of the Signatory Parties and of Czechoslovakia. No response of the Czechoslovak Government was expected, as expressly stated by the British Prime Minister while handing over the Agreement to Czechoslovak representatives. What would happen in case of Czechoslovakia's negative standpoint was clearly stressed by one of the British delegates, the diplomat Frank Ashton-Gwatkin: *"If you fail to accept it, then it means that you will have to settle it alone with Germany..."*[2]

The Czechoslovak representation headed by President Edvard Beneš accepted the Agreement on 30 September as the only alternative to it was a war of the isolated Czechoslovakia against the Nazi Power, actually supported by Hungary and probably also by Poland while the Western Powers would in fact stay indifferent (with an uncertain position of the Soviet Union). Foreign Minister Kamil Krofta, however, warned France and Great Britain that the Munich decision actually meant more armament for Germany as the Czechoslovak Army had to leave in the ceded border forts cannons, machine guns and ammunition worth two connectly crowns.[3]

The decision of the Czechoslovak Government was also influenced by the hope that a part of the land in question could be saved by a decision of the above Committee and that the country would obtain guarantees from all European Powers; this, however, was not the case. The final delimitation of the

[2] Hubert Masařík, *V proměnách Evropy. Paměti československého diplomata* [Amidst the transformations of Europe. Memoirs of a Czechoslovak diplomat]. Paseka, Praha – Litomyšl 2002, p. 242.

[3] *Československá zahraniční politika v roce 1938. Dokumenty československé zahraniční politiky* [Czechoslovak foreign policy in 1938. Documents on Czechoslovak foreign policy]. Eds. Jindřich Dejmek in cooperation with Jan Němeček, Helena Nováčková and Ivan Šťovíček. Vol. A/20/2, Praha 2001, doc. No. 781, p. 460.

ceded land by the Berlin Committee, chaired by Foreign Ministry State Secretary Ernst von Weizsäcker, was actually dictated by the German party fully in accordance with their strategic needs and in view of the future eventual destruction of Czechoslovakia. While the Czechoslovak party expected that the so-called Fifth Zone would be based on the 1930 census and would include areas with 75 % German majority, the Germans, supported by the representatives of Great Britain and Italy, enforced a decision saying that the areas to be ceded would be those with 51 % of German population based on the 1910 census. As a result, large territories were to be ceded inside Bohemia and Moravia and, in addition, some 600 thousand Czechs living in those areas would suddenly be ceded to Germany, too.

The Czechs and Slovaks were not granted a possibility to defend their country by force against the claims of Nazi Germany. On 30 September 1938 they faced the wall of unified position of the democratic and the totalitarian powers, namely Great Britain and France on the one hand and Germany and Italy on the other.

The real significance of the Munich Agreement for Hitler was proved by the fact that as early as 21 October 1938, less than a month after its signing, he ordered the German armed forces to prepare a liquidation of what remained of Czechoslovakia. All his next steps taken both at the military and the diplomatic level aimed at destroying the Czechoslovak state and culminated in the open aggression of March 1939.

Repudiation of the Munich Agreement during the Second World War

Following the declaration of the Slovak State and the German occupation of the Czech Lands in mid-March 1939 Czecho-Slovakia actually ceased to exist. Although the demo-

cratic powers and the Soviet Union did not recognize the new situation there was still a danger that the Czechoslovak state would disappear also de iure. Actually, Slovakia was recognized de facto by Great Britain and France that appointed their consuls there, and in the latter half of the year 1939 Slovakia was also recognized de iure by the Soviet Union.[4] To ensure an uninterrupted legal existence of the Czechoslovak Republic [CSR] it was necessary to establish an internationally recognized body that would represent the Czechoslovak state and that could also express Czechoslovakia's standpoint concerning the Munich. The politician that succeeded in this matter was ex-President E. Beneš. In spring 1939 he protested against the March events with the Powers and in the League of Nations and, moreover, he publicly presented the theory of CSR-continuity based, among other arguments, on the invalidity of the Munich Agreement, and he put himself at the head of the foreign resistance movement striving for a restoration of Czechoslovakia. His leading position, however, was not automatically recognized and he had to fight for it with his political rivals, namely with the Czechoslovak Ambassador in France Štefan Osuský and the former Prime Minister Milan Hodža, and also with the British and the French governments.[5]

The postulate of absolute invalidity of the Munich Agreement and of that Agreement having been accepted under the threat of force became the base of the theory of legal and po-

[4] *Od rozpadu Česko-Slovenska do uznání československé prozatímní vlády 1939–1940. Dokumenty československé zahraniční politiky* [From the disintegration of Czecho-Slovakia to the recognition of Czechoslovak Provisional Government 1939–1940. Documents on Czechoslovak foreign policy]. Eds. Jan Němeček, Jan Kuklík, Ivan Šťovíček, Helena Nováčková. Vol. B/1, Praha 2002, p. 25 ff.

[5] Jan Kuklík, Jan Němeček, *Proti Benešovi! Česká a slovenská protibenešovská opozice v Londýně 1939–1945* [Against Beneš! The Czech and Slovak anti-Beneš opposition in London 1939–1945]. Karolinum, Praha 2003.

litical continuity of the Czechoslovak Republic as formulated and advocated by Beneš during the war. He, however, used it also to support his position of President in Exile by stating that his resignation of October 1938 had occurred under German pressure and was therefore null and void.[6] The effort of the Czechoslovak representation in exile to "undo" (repudiate) the Munich Agreement was also closely linked to their endeavor to convince the Powers that Czechoslovakia had already been in a state of war with Germany as of September 1938, one year before the outbreak of the Second World War.[7]

However, neither France nor Great Britain were willing at the early stage of the war to become committed to the question of Czechoslovakia's restoration; therefore, only a body named Czechoslovak National Committee was established in Paris in autumn 1938 with the aim of controlling the Czechoslovak troops in France. It was only after the defeat of France and after Winston Churchill's becoming Prime Minister that a legal Czechoslovak state representation in exile could be established with its Government, President, and the State Council as an advisory body. The Government was recognized – to a limited extent – by Great Britain on 21 July 1940. The British Government also declared that the recognition did not mean any commitment to the future borders of Czechoslovakia.

Great Britain

On 30 September 1940 British Prime Minister W. Churchill declared in his radio speech made on the occasion of the second anniversary of signing the Munich Agreement that

[6] Jan Kuklík, *Londýnský exil a obnova československého státu 1938–1945* [The London exile and the restoration of Czechoslovak state 1938–1945]. Karolinum, Praha 1998, p. 74 ff.

[7] *Ibid.*

"within six months the solemn pledges given by the unscrupulous men who control the destiny of Germany were broken and the agreement destroyed with a ruthlessness which unmasked the true nature of their reckless ambitions to the whole world..."[8] As there were different interpretations, particularly on the Czechoslovak part, of the British Prime Minister's words the Foreign Office decided to specify more precisely its standpoint. The letter dated 11 November 1940 and sent by Robert Bruce Lockhardt, the British diplomatic representative to the Czechoslovak Government in exile, confirmed that in the question of Czechoslovak borders the British Government was no more committed to the Munich Agreement and to the changes of the borderline made in the consequence thereof, but until the end of the war they were not willing to tend to another solution.[9] In the opinion of the British Government the Munich Agreement had been duly signed, but Britain had ceased to be committed to it due to its "destruction" by Hitler on 15 March 1939. The British position remained unchanged also after the final recognition of the Czechoslovak Government in Exile by the British Government on 18 July 1941.

This, however, does not mean that the Czechoslovak side resigned. In spite of that, President Beneš endeavored to convince his British counterparts to revise their position concerning the Munich Agreement in order not to burden their mutual relations. An endless exchange of viewpoints followed during the whole year, both in writing or in the form of memorandum.

[8] *Od uznání československé prozatímní vlády do vyhlášení válečného stavu Německu 1940–1941. Dokumenty československé zahraniční politiky* [From the recognition of Czechoslovak Provisional Government to the declaration of war to Germany 1940–1941. Documents of Czechoslovak foreign policy]. Eds. Jan Němeček, Jan Kuklík, Ivan Šťovíček, Helena Nováčková. Vol. B/2/1, Praha 2006, doc. No. 58, p. 141.

[9] *Ibid.*, doc. No. 81, pp. 191–192.

The British side first linked its Munich-related standpoint to the condition of settling the Sudetengerman problem and including the Sudetengerman representation in the leadership of the Czechoslovak foreign resistance movement. However, the talks between President Beneš and Wenzel Jaksch, leader of the Sudetengerman Social-democratic Party in exile, failed. The way to a compromise in the Czechoslovak-British negotiations was very long and difficult. The Czechoslovak Government insisted on the principle that everything that had happened in the matter of Czechoslovak borders after 19 September 1938 (the date of the British-French plan of ceding Czechoslovak border areas to Germany, presented as an ultimatum) could not be regarded as legally valid as Czechoslovakia had been forced to accept it by a threat of using force. All positions of the Czechoslovak Government in Exile were based on the condition that the Munich Agreement had been null and void; this, however, was strongly denied by the British side. Nevertheless, the negotiations were also influenced by a number of external factors strengthening the Czechoslovak position. There is no doubt that a very important factor was the Soviet requirement to restore Czechoslovakia in its pre-Munich territory, as officially confirmed by Soviet diplomacy early in June 1942.[10] The British side agreed that Czechoslovakia might be restored more or less within its pre-Munich borders, but was reluctant to make any public binding declaration in this matter as it would have an immediate impact on other matters, such as the Polish-Soviet border dispute. The negotiations were certainly influenced also by the more and more aggressive German oc-

[10] *Československá zahraniční politika v roce 1942. Dokumenty československé zahraniční politiky* [Foreign policy of Czechoslovakia in 1942. Documents on Czechoslovak foreign policy]. Eds. Jan Němeček, Jan Kuklík, Ivan Šťovíček, Helena Nováčková. Vol. B/3/1, Praha 2010, doc. No. 153, pp. 327–331.

cupation policy in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia that culminated in the drastic persecution after the assassination of Acting Reichsprotektor Reinhard Heydrich.[11]

With its declaration concerning Munich as contained in the letter sent by British Foreign Minister Anthony Eden to his Czechoslovak counterpart, Foreign Minister Jan Masaryk, and dated 5 August 1942 the British Government dissociated itself from the Munich Agreement by stating: *"At final settlement of the Czechoslovak frontiers to be reached at the end of the war they will not be influenced by any changes effected in and since 1938."* Nevertheless, the legal opinion referred to Churchill's speech of 1940.[12]

Despite the obvious compromising nature of the British repudiation of the Munich Agreement the above document was a great satisfaction to Beneš' policy and to him personally and it was also used in Czechoslovak propaganda. In their letters to W. Churchill and A. Eden, respectively, both E. Beneš and J. Masaryk suggested to consider the Munich matter "closed" so as not to burden any more the relations between the two countries. This became also the British position as expressed by W. Churchill in his letter dated 2 September 1942 to Beneš saying that *"the policy of concessions to the aggressor has been long dead."*[13]

Nevertheless, in spite of these optimistic declarations the Munich Agreement continued influencing the negotiations between the two countries. This can be seen, e.g., in the talks

[11] Jan Kuklík, Jan Němeček, *Československá exilová vláda, Britové a atentát na Reinharda Heydricha* [Czechoslovak government in exile, the British and the Assassination of Reinhard Heydrich]. In: Moderní dějiny, Vol. 18, No. 2, 2010, pp. 145–176.

[12] The National Archives (TNA), London, Fond: Foreign Office (FO) 371, 30835, C 7666, A. Eden to J. Masaryk 05. 08. 1942.

[13] J. Kuklík, *Londýnský exil a obnova československého státu* [The London exile and the restoration of Czechoslovak state], p. 130.

on the so-called "border formula" held from the end of 1944 on. It was not until the exchange of notes between Nichols and Ripka on 7 and 12 March 1945 that the British side decided to support the full administrative power of Czechoslovak authorities over the pre-Munich territory of that country.[14] Even more difficult were then the negotiations concerning the transfer of the German minority; this question, however, goes beyond the scope of the present paper.

In 1944-1945, the Czechoslovak view of the Munich Agreement and its nullity was reflected in Czechoslovakia's requirements for the peace treaty with Germany. Germany, as the last signatory of the Agreement, was to recognize at the moment of its surrender the nullity of the Munich Agreement and Czechoslovakia was to be restored in its pre-Munich territory. The specific requirements relating to that document included also the above mentioned question of the state of war with Germany and Hungary and its starting date, compensation for the weapons and military material lost following the Agreement, repatriation of Czechoslovak nationals from the German territory, and consequent punishment of war criminals with relation to Czechoslovakia. The talks were also used by the Czechoslovak side to formulate and present its views concerning the transfer of German and Hungarian minority members from Czechoslovakia so that *"those Germans and Hungarians that will lose Czechoslovak nationality shall be recognized by the enemy countries as their nationals and shall be transferred to their territory"* and their property "*shall be either seized within the criminal sanctions or set off against the Czechoslovak claims on the enemy countries.*" The ceasefire conditions should also include the obligation of the enemy countries to receive the transferred persons *"as soon as these cross*

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 133.

the border" and "to settle them permanently on their territory."[15] All the materials for the European Advisory Commission were submitted on 24 August 1944 by Minister Masaryk in the form of aide mémoire to the Commission Chairman John Winant. The Commission took note of the Czechoslovak requirements and discussed them with Czechoslovak representatives in a special committee on 8 February 1945; however, no binding statement was made. The document issued by the European Advisory Commission on 7 December 1945, entitled Instrument of Unconditional Surrender of Germany, was sent to the Allied Governments and contained just the general military and political conditions of surrender. The question of Czechoslovak borders was mentioned only indirectly by referring to the border of Germany as at 31 December 1937 and by leaving the Czechoslovak claims (as well as the claims of other allied countries) open to additional submission to and implementation by occupation authorities, e.g., in the form of Declaration or Order.[16] Thus, by the end of the Second World War the Allied Powers failed to adopt a common final position in the matter of Munich Agreement, its nullity, and the consequences resulting thereof.

The British position did not show any major shift after the war and, actually, there was no opportunity then in the British case for Czechoslovak and later Czech diplomacy to reopen that question. Moreover, the negative British view of the Munich Agreement as being null and void was well known and Czechoslovak diplomacy would certainly have had to offer something to make them change that view. The last British statement so far in this matter is that of Queen Elisabeth II

[15] Archiv ministerstva zahraničních věcí (AMZV), Praha [Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, Prague], Fond Londýnský archiv [London File] – confidential [LA-conf.], box 154.

[16] *Ibid.*

during her visit to Prague in 1996. At a dinner given on that occasion in the Prague Castle on 27 March of that year the Queen recalled some historical reminiscences of the Czech-British relations in the 17th century and then mentioned also the tradition of Masaryk's First Republic whose short existence ended with a disaster. And the Queen considered the events leading to the country's end *"the only shadow over our relationship"* and expressed her understanding for *"the feelings existing in this country over the Munich Agreement."*[17]

The above mentioned statement of W. Churchill from 1940 and the next one made by A. Eden in 1942 on the subsequent invalidity of the Munich Agreement, as reconfirmed in 1966 by British Foreign Minister Michael Stewart, can be apparently considered to be a permanent British position concerning the Munich Agreement. This was also reiterated in the position of British diplomacy in reply to my letter to the British Ambassador in Prague in 2010 which referred to the two fundamental documents, namely Churchill's speech of September 1940 and the exchange of letters in August 1942.[18]

France

The rather questionable and compromising "repudiation" by Great Britain was followed by France, namely by the French National Committee headed by General Charles de Gaulle, which started negotiating an exchange of letters late in summer 1942 to redress the French signature under the Munich Agreement. De Gaulle even stated in his initial instructions that the French declaration must favor Czechoslovakia much more than the British declaration.

[17] Archiv Kanceláře prezidenta republiky, Praha [Presidential Office Archives, Prague], separate material.

[18] Letter sent to the author by the political secretary of British Embassy in Prague, Alexander Pykett, on 06. 05. 2010.

Shortly after the British declaration made by A. Eden in August 1942 de Gaulle accepted the Czech suggestion to start discussion on the particular form of such a step. In his instructions for the Foreign Commissioner of the Committee, Maurice Dejean, he added: *"As far as the future borders of Czechoslovakia are concerned, we must be ready to support the integrity of Czechoslovakia as it existed prior to Munich. Nevertheless, we must formulate it so as to have later free hands in the matter of the Sudetengerman minority inside Czechoslovakia, of the fate of Slovaks, and of the population in the region of Těšín. Still, our declaration must be formulated more in favor of Czechoslovakia than that of Great Britain."*[19]

However, the first proposals made by the French side early in September 1942 were far from being too attractive to the Czechoslovak representation in exile as they coincided with the British position and were speaking about the Munich Agreement being "torn up" by Germany on 15 March 1939. Therefore, they were rejected by the Czechoslovak side.[20] As followed from the further talks, the French proposal had been prepared in too much a hurry and without detailed preliminary consultations with the Czechoslovak side.

French Foreign Commissioner Dejean then proposed on his own initiative on 22 September 1942 to the Czechoslovak side a mutual exchange of letters between General de Gaulle and Czechoslovak Prime Minister in exile Msgre. Jan Šrámek.[21]

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[19] Antoine Marès, *Francouzsko-československé vztahy v letech 1944–1948 neboli mnichovský syndrom* [The French-Czechoslovak relations 1944–1948 or the Munich syndrome]. In: Soudobé dějiny, Vol. 6, No. 2–3, 1999, p. 188.

[20] Archiv Ústavu T. G. Masaryka (AÚTGM), Praha [T. G. Masaryk Institute Archives Prague], Fond EB II, EB-V 83/1, box 112; Národní archiv (NA), Praha [National Archives, Prague], Fond Hubert Ripka, 1–12–61–5, draft French declaration of 02. 09. 1942.

[21] AMZV, Praha, Fond LA-conf., box 136, F. Černý's record of the interview with M. Dejean on 22. 09. 1942.

Thus, in one week's time the two parties could negotiate and approve what in the British case had dragged many weeks. The French declaration proved eventually more favorable to Czechoslovakia than the British document, as the French Committee declared that it: *"... rejects the agreements signed in Munich on 29 September 1938,... considers these agreements null and void as well as all the other acts that occurred during the implementation of or resulting from them. Not recognizing any territorial changes concerning Czechoslovakia that occurred in 1938 or later it undertakes to do everything feasible so as to ensure that the Czechoslovak Republic within its pre-September 1938 borders obtains all efficient guarantees as to its military and economic security, its territorial integrity, and its political unity."*[22] De Gaulle did not coordinate his actions with the British party and the British Government to face "le fait accompli". He hoped that this action would restore the French influence in Central Europe where, as he said on the signing day to the Czechoslovak diplomatic representative, František Černý, "Czechoslovakia is one of the most important and most significant states". He relied on a lack of British interest in that region and, on the other hand, on an increased influence of Russia, which he intended to oppose with the restored Franco-Czechoslovak alliance.[23]

Paradoxically, it was the allied Polish government that protested against the French annulment of the Munich Agreement as it viewed this action as a step against the Polish claims

[22] *Československo-francouzské vztahy v diplomatických jednáních* [The Czechoslovak-French relations in diplomatic negotiations]. Eds. Jan Němeček, Helena Nováčková, Ivan Šťovíček, Jan Kuklík, Karolinum, Praha 2005, doc. No. 105, p. 176; Edvard Beneš, *Šest let exilu a druhé světové války* [Six years of exile and of the Second World War]. Orbis, Praha 1946, pp. 476–477.

[23] AMZV, Praha, f. LA–conf., box 67, F. Černý's record of his interview with Gen. Ch. de Gaulle on 29. 09. 1942.

on some disputed territories on the border with Czechoslovakia. It considered the French support for the Czechoslovak demand to restore the country's pre-Munich borders to be harmful to Poland's interests and to contradict the protection of Polish territorial integrity in its pre-1938 state. Polish Prime Minister Władysław Sikorski asked Foreign Minister Edward Raczyński with a letter dated 30 September 1942 to make a strong protest to the French side.[24] Sikorski considered the action taken by the French side, which had not only repudiated the Munich Agreement, but implicitly also the subsequent state after the Polish ultimatum to Czechoslovakia and the occupation of Czechoslovak territories, "inadmissible" and added that he could not accept any decision in this matter or any discussion thereon without the Poles. Therefore, Raczyński sent a protest to the French National Committee on 9 October 1942. In the letter the French support for the Czechoslovak demand to restore the pre-Munich borders is considered to be harmful to Poland's interests and to contradict the protection of Polish territorial integrity as in the pre-1938 state:

"Distinguished Mr. National Commissioner, in connection with the exchange of letters of 29 September between the French National Committee and the Czechoslovak Government on the rejection of the Munich Agreements as published on 30 September in the press the Polish Government considers it necessary to draw the French National Committee's attention to the fact that the Polish-Czechoslovak border was changed in 1938 and the commitment of the French National Committee to support the efforts aimed at restoring Czechoslovakia in its territorial integrity as prior to 1938 could be regarded as an obligation that

[24] Instytut Polski i Muzeum im. gen. Sikorskiego, London, Fond Prezydium Rady Ministrów, sign. 65, W. Sikorski to E. Raczyński on 30. 09. 1942.

is harmful to Poland's interests and contradicts the principle of protection of its territorial integrity. In this situation the Polish Government must state to its regret that the French National Committee, without having consulted with the Polish Government the action that might affect Poland's interests, took a position that is obviously harmful to the collaboration based on mutual trust that has up to now tied the Polish Government and the French National Committee. The Polish Government, led by an honest effort to maintain friendly relations with the French National Committee in compliance with the spirit of alliance between Poland and France, hopes that the French National Committee will meet the obligations connecting our two nations and that it will allay the fear provoked by the existence of that letter with the Polish Government by specifying the precise meaning given to that part of its letter dated 29 September. Please accept, distinguished Mr. National Commissioner, the assurance of my deep respect. E. Raczyński."[25]

The situation did not improve after a change in the position of Foreign Commissioner of the French National Committee, either. Dejean, who had shown much fondness for the Czechoslovak matter, was replaced immediately after 29 September 1942 by René Pleven, who was more reserved. The latter disagreed with the initially very resolute draft text of French reply to Polish government that had been agreed by Czechoslovak diplomats with Dejean.[26] The final version was therefore much more favorable for the Polish side as it did not insist on a restitution of the original Czechoslovak-Polish border of September 1938, but spoke only about a "gentlemen's agreement"

[25] Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Paris, Fond Guerre 1939–45, Londres CNF, Vol. 291. The letter was received by the National Foreign Secretary Cabinet on 10. 10. 1942.

[26] See Černý's record of his interview with Pleven, Cassin and Grandin of 24. 10. 1942. AMZV, Praha, Fond LA–conf., box 136.

in this matter between Czechoslovakia and Poland.[27] This, of course, was a concession made to the Polish side as the above formulation (like the British one) permitted an ambiguous interpretation. Of course, both sides made use of this fact and the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs interpreted it as a full restitution of the country's borders as in September 1938. On the other hand, Raczyński's speech before the Polish Council of Ministers ended with a happy statement that the French National Committee in its reply, referring to the principles of long-time friendly cooperation between France and Poland, declared that it had by no means meant any obligation on the part of France that might prove harmful to the Polish side.[28]

As a result of the negative Polish reaction the leaders of the French foreign resistance movement refused to make any additional statement in the matter of Munich repudiation until summer 1944. It was only a resolute action taken by the Czechoslovak Government, which despite the British negative position was the first to recognize the French Provisional Government headed by de Gaulle after the Allied invasion in Normandy on 10 June 1944, that made it possible to sign on 17 August 1944 a Czechoslovak-French declaration containing again a formulation that both parties *"consider the Munich Agreements and their all consequences null and void."*[29]

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[27] Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, Fond Poland. Poselstwo Czechoslovakia, folder 6/3, box 6, Pleven's letter to E. Raczyński of 03. 11. 1942.

[28] *Protokoły posiedzeń Rady ministrów Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej* [Polish Council of Ministers, minutes of the meetings], Part V, Secesja. Cracow 2001, doc. No. 141, Minutes of the meeting of the Polish Council of Ministers of 4. December 1942, p. 100.

[29] AMZV, Praha, Fond Archives of Agreements, sign. 1775, Joint French-Czechoslovak Declaration of 17. 08. 1944. See legal comparison of the British and the French positions concerning the repudiation of Munich Agreement: Eduard Táborský, *The Czechoslovak Cause. An account of the problems of International Law in relation to Czechoslovakia*, H. F. &G. Witherby Ltd., London 1944, pp. 27–28.

Early in the 1990s the Warsaw Pact disintegrated and a security vacuum emerged. As a result, efforts were made to create a new security system based on bilateral agreements prior to joining the NATO. Czechoslovak diplomacy was aware while negotiating these agreements that it would be necessary to refer in these documents also to some questions from their past mutual relations. In relation to the signatories, of course, this included also the Munich question. The negotiations on a treaty of understanding and friendship between the Czech and the Slovak Federal Republic and the Republic of France taking place in summer 1991 showed that there was a problem in repudiating the Munich Agreement, which was supposed to be mentioned in its preamble. In the first round of negotiations the French party rejected any such formulation referring to the necessity of consulting this question (and its probable rejection) with Germany. The Czechoslovak Ambassador in Paris, Jaroslav Šedivý, however, reminded the French representatives of the Czechoslovak-French Declaration of August 1944 repudiating the Munich Agreement and added that *"the socialist President Mitterrand certainly cannot stay behind the conservative President de Gaulle who signed that text."*[30] After further talks the French party accepted the formulation proposed by the Czechoslovak party and the Treaty was then signed on 1 October 1941 in Paris. Thus, France confirmed the continuity of its declarations made in 1942 and 1944.

Italy

The liquidation of the Munich Agreement on the part of its third signatory, Italy, could logically be negotiated only af-

[30] Jaroslav Šedivý, *Velvyslancem u Eiffelovy věže 1990–1994. Praha – Paříž v zahraniční politice* [Being an ambassador under the Eiffel Tower 1990–1994. Prague-Paris in international policy]. Mladá fronta, Praha 2008, p. 85.

ter the fall of the Mussolini fascist regime which was co-responsible for the preparation of the Munich Agreement. The favorable standpoint of the new Italian government in relation to Czechoslovakia was no big surprise. Czechoslovakia was outside of the immediate interest area of the Italian foreign policy, unlike Yugoslavia or Romania. Italian diplomacy knew well that the relations to the restored Czechoslovakia would be of great importance to Italy, as they relied on reminiscences of the First World War and the existence of Czechoslovak legions in Italy. There were also economic reasons, as the Italian port of Trieste was of great importance for the international contacts of Czech industry.

This, however, does not mean that Italian diplomacy did not have any doubts about the legal matters connected to the restoration of Czechoslovakia. Quite on contrary; as follows from a legal statement of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs dated 26 October 1944 (just one month after the repudiation of the Munich Agreement by Italy) Italy continued recognizing the existence of an independent Slovakia. Italian diplomacy formulated its specific, though rather dissonant position: *"Italy's position concerning the emerging Czechoslovak state, as defined in the declaration of the Italian Government, is incompatible – as long as the Slovak state effectively exists – with the position resulting from the fact that it did recognize the Slovak state some time ago. By no means can be spoken about an annulment of that recognition."*[31] In an instruction to the Italian envoy in the Vatican, Babusci Rizzo, of 30 October 1944, the lack of legal clarity in the relations to Czechoslovakia was stressed: *"... the legal situation between Italy and Czechoslovakia is complicated and at the explicit level even indescribable. Anyway,*

[31] *I Documenti diplomatici italiani*, Decima Serie: 1943–1948. Vol. I: 9 settembre *1943* – 11 dicembre 1944. Ed. Pietro Pastorelli. Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, Roma 1992; doc. No. 494, p. 577.

regardless of the legal situation, our obvious political interest is to consider Czechoslovakia as an independent state…"[32]

Negotiations on the liquidation of Munich started on neutral ground in Geneva where the first talks on this matter took place between the unofficial Czechoslovak representative Jaromír Kopecký[33] and the Italian press attaché who then informed the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.[34] The venue then moved to the liberated capital of Rome and as a result of the talks Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs Carlo Sforza communicated on 26 September 1944 to the Czechoslovak representative in Rome, Vladimír Vaněk, the unanimous decision of the Italian Government headed by Ivanoe Bonomi. The Italian Government declared that it considered the Munich Agreement null and void (nuls et non-avenus). Nevertheless, Italy went even farther by declaring null and void also the Vienna Arbitration of 2 November 1938 in relation to Czechoslovakia: *"Stating that the policy of the fascist regime against Czechoslovakia contradicted the most noble traditions of Italy, but also with our most essential interests, and confirming that that policy provided major evidence of the fascism being subjected to Hitler's Germany,*

[32] *Ibid.*, doc. No. 498, p. 580, instruction by Ministry of Foreign Affairs Undersecretary Visconti Venosta to the diplomatic envoy in the Vatican Babusci Rizzo of 30. 10. 1944.

[33] AMZV, Praha, Fond LA–conf., box 77, note on telegram received on 21. 8. 1942 from Jaromír Kopecký in Geneva who reported that he *"met in Miss Wiskemann's place with the Press Attaché of the Italian Embassy in Bern who had been delegated there from Berlin where he had spent many years and he knew our people there and was a hundred-percent supporter of the Allies. He informed Dr. Kopecký that the Italian Ambassador to Bern had made a proposal to the Italian Government to declare on behalf of Italy the Munich Agreements null. This happened in consequence of a meeting of the Italian Press Attaché with Dr. Kopecký who explained him the Czechoslovak position concerning these Agreements…"*

[34] Archivio Storico Diplomatico (ASD), Roma, Serie Affari Politici 1931–1945, Cecoslovacchia, busta 29.

the Italian Government solemnly declares that it considers null and void the Munich Agreement of 29 September 1938 and the so-called Ciano-Ribbentrop Arbitration Decision formulated in Vienna on 2 November 1938, as well as all other acts resulting from those agreements and decisions that proved detrimental to the independence and integrity of the Czechoslovak Republic. The Italian Government declares before the world and history that all these acts and agreements constituted a betrayal of the belief and will of the Italian people which, as long as was free, wanted a policy of trustful and fruitful cooperation with Czechoslovakia in the interest of peace and freedom of Europe."[35]

From discussions at the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs follows that the liquidation of Munich was done without any previous major talks inside Italian diplomacy. Still, as mentioned on 28 September 1944 by Vittorio Zoppi, director of the Institute of Political Affairs, some dissonance occurred when Perrone Capano of IV Department of the Institute asked whether the gesture (repudiation of the Munich Agreement) had been accompanied by Czechoslovakia's promise to support the Italian policy of "defending our eastern border", whereupon Zoppi responded: "*The draft document was approved by Count Sforza, submitted to the Government, approved by the Government, without having asked the relevant departments of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for their comments.*"[36] The Italian Government seems to have too much hurried with the repu-

[35] E. Beneš, *Šest let exilu a druhé světové války* [Six years of exile and of Second World War], pp. 486–487. The declaration text in Italian (considered being authentic) and French is available at AMZV, Praha, Fond LA–conf., box 77, and there is also a political report No. 3 written by Vladimír Vaněk on 29 September 1942 concerning the repudiation of Munich by Italy. The declaration was published on 27. 09. 1944 also in the Italian newspaper Corriere di Roma under the title Gli Accordi di Monaco dichiriati nulli dal Governo Italiano. ASD, Roma, Affari Politici 1931–1945, Cecoslovacchia, busta 29.

[36] *I Documenti diplomatici italiani*, Decima Serie: 1943–1948, doc. No. 438 and note No. 3 on the same document.

diation without having negotiated in connection with this step any particular support on the part of the Czechoslovak Government in Exile. The reasons of the Italian action consisted undoubtedly in the fact that in the ceasefire with Italy, signed by the Allies in September 1943, the Item XII supposed that the political, economic and financial questions would be settled later on. Therefore, the Italian Government had to present itself in the foreign political respect in the best possible light as the Czechoslovak Government in its note to the Allied governments declared that it was de facto as well as de iure at the state of war with Italy and required Czechoslovakia to be admitted as a party to the future peace treaty. The treaty was supposed to contain a stipulation that Italy recognized the invalidity of both the Munich Agreement and the Vienna Arbitration.

Italy's repudiation of the Munich Agreement, which was going much farther than that of France and Great Britain, had broader consequences as it did not serve as a precedent only, but it had also a positive impact on the Czechoslovak relations with the Vatican. The Italian Government also used it immediately for propaganda purposes in order to strengthen its position for negotiations on the restoration of the country. Nevertheless, not all states, namely those in the Balkans, were as successful as Czechoslovakia in the liquidation of the consequences of Italian aggressive policy. Romania, for example, although referring specifically to the Italian declaration of invalidity of the Munich Agreement and of the Vienna Arbitration, failed to be as successful as the Czechoslovak representation in the matter of the Second Vienna Arbitration according to which a part of Siebenburgen had been attached to Hungary. Although the Italian Government declared the Vienna Decision of 30 August 1940 to be non-existent, Romania was not explicitly mentioned in the declaration.[37]

[37] AMZV, Praha, Fond LA–conf., box 77, report by Ambassador Vladimír Vaněk of 23. 01. 1945. According to another Vaněk's report of 22

Following the example of France, Italy reiterated in the early 1990s the declaration of the Italian Government of 1944 on the Munich Agreement. This occurred in connection with the preparation of the Czechoslovak-Italian Agreement during which the Italian Government (like that of France) initially refused to include a reference to the declaration of invalidity of the Munich Agreement null and void as had been agreed in 1944. Nevertheless, the formulation was eventually included in the deed's stipulations and the Agreement was signed in 1991. However, due to the disintegration of the Czechoslovak state it was not ratified and renegotiated by the two successor states. As to the Czech Republic, the respective agreement was signed as late as 23 January 1996 in Rome and in its Article 1 the declaration of the Italian Government of 26 September 1944 on the Munich Agreement being considered null and void was reconfirmed.

Germany

As far as the last signatory of the Munich Agreement is concerned, the two German states that had been created in the late 1940s on the ruins of the Nazi Reich approached the problem of invalidity of the Munich Agreement in a different way.

January Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs Alcide de Gasperi had made the following declaration at the Council of Ministers meeting on 18. 01. 1945: *"The Vienna Arbitration of 30 August 1940 meant a Fascist servility to the Nazi aggressiveness in the Danube Region and is therefore solemnly declared non-existent. The Italian Government assures its deep belief in the necessity of friendship and collaboration between the Italian nation and the Danube-Balkan nations in the common interest and in the interest of Europe's resurrection... Minister de Gasperi added that with these two declarations the Italian Government continues following the policy that started on 26 September 1944 with the annulment of the Munich and Vienna arbitrations and of all acts that might be harmful to the independence of the Czechoslovak Republic."*

The pro-Soviet government of the German Democratic Republic, which had been recognized by Czechoslovakia soon after the creation of the East German state, first signed a bilateral agreement on its border with Poland early in June 1950 (known as the Görlitzer Abkommen) and then, on 23 June 1950, stated in a joint Czechoslovak-German declaration that there were no disputed questions between the two states and that the two parties had no territorial or border claims to each other. This was followed in September 1958 by a joint Czechoslovak-German declaration that condemned the Munich Agreement as one of *"the most shameful documents of modern history"* and that Agreement was declared null and void as it had been made under pressure and threat of war not only on the part of Adolf Hitler, but also on the part of western Powers.[38]

The position of West German governments in relation to this problem was more complicated because of many reasons, one of them being the non-existence of diplomatic relations between Czechoslovakia and the Federal Republic of Germany. The dispute over the in/validity of the Munich Agreement was also one of the factors that caused a failure of the attempt of at least a partial normalization of relations between the two countries in the 1960s, which was also largely due to the negative role of the organizations of Sudeten Germans expelled from Czechoslovakia, particularly the Sudetendeutsche Landsmannschaft. The long-dragging negotiations culminated early in the 1970s in connection with the preparation of a Czechoslovak-West German agreement and in that connection also of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

[38] Jaroslav Kučera, *„Žralok nebude nikdy tak silný". Československá zahraniční politika vůči Německu 1945–1948* ["Never will the shark be that strong". Czechoslovak foreign policy in relation to Germany 1945–1948]. Argo, Praha 2005, p. 183.

With the agreement signed on 11 December 1973 and followed by the establishment of mutual diplomatic relations the Bonn Government declared the Munich Agreement nullified, but not null and void as required by Czechoslovak diplomacy. The question of nullity of the Munich Agreement (the respective paragraph reads: *"The Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany, in view of their mutual relations according to the present Agreement, consider the Munich Agreement of 29 September 'null' /in the German text the term 'nichtig' was used/")* became the cause of different interpretations by either party, which reverberated in the ratification process of the Czechoslovak-West German Agreement in the parliaments of the two countries. While on the Czechoslovak side the top representatives were stressing that nullity of the Munich Agreement must be regarded as null and void, German Foreign Minister Walter Scheel in his report before the Bundestag rejected that Czechoslovak interpretation.[39]

None of the following German statements on the Munich Agreement made between 1989 and 2011 went beyond what had been agreed in the Czechoslovak-German Agreement of 1973. On contrary: In some cases it was believed that even that compromise would be questioned. The question was first raised in connection with the reunification of Germany which was being prepared. When the negotiations of the four Powers, namely the USA, Great Britain, France and the Soviet Union, with the two German states, Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic started, it was Poland that joined the talks by requiring a confirmation of the existing Oder-Neisse line as a border of the country.

[39] Jan Kuklík, Jan Němeček, Jaroslav Šebek, *Dlouhé stíny Mnichova. Mnichovská dohoda očima signatářů a její dopady na Československo* [The long shadows of Munich. The Munich Agreement viewed through the eyes of its signatories and its impact on Czechoslovakia]. Auditorium, Praha 2011, pp. 288–291.

Polish diplomacy headed by Foreign Minister Krzysztof Skubiszewski invited Czechoslovakia to join the negotiations and their claims by requiring a confirmation of the Munich Agreement being null and void.

Czechoslovak diplomatic officials hesitated with their answer and finally informed the Polish side that they would support the Polish position in the matter of Poland's western borders, but that Czechoslovakia would not try to join the 4 + 2 talks. Foreign Minister Jaroslav Šedivý commented on it later by saying: *"In the Munich matter I came to an almost certain conclusion that this could not succeed. The British position concerning the recognition of the Munich Agreement as null and void had always been negative and the Germans always referred to it whenever we negotiated or talked with them on this matter. The British insisted that the Munich Agreement had duly come into force, remained in force for six months, and was only destroyed by Hitler by having occupied Bohemia and Moravia on 15 March 1939. President Beneš tried several times during the war to make the British change their view. I think that Churchill writes somewhere in his Memoirs that once he told Beneš that Great Britain had signed in the past so many unfair agreements that if he had admitted the invalidity of one of them, the whole contractual system of Her Majesty's Empire would fall into pieces. This is a part of the British tradition, the British repeated it in the 1960s when this question was raised again there, and they confirmed it also in 1992 when a large discussion started in this country. Even if we had succeeded in putting this item on the agenda of the 4 + 2 Conference we could not have gone beyond this British position… I have been convinced until now that our view was based on a realistic assessment of the situation."*[40] This assessment can be considered justified and

[40] Jaroslav Šedivý, *Černínský palác v roce nula (ze zákulisí polistopadové zahraniční politiky)* [Czernin Palace in the year zero (from behind the scenes of post-November foreign policy)]. Ivo Železný, Praha 1997, pp. 79 and 82.

I believe that documents of the British Foreign Ministry from the 1970s and 1980s support to some extent the arguments expressed by J. Šedivý. Still, there is a question whether linking the Munich problem to that of reunification of Germany might not make British diplomacy return to the 1968-1973 contemplations of changing its declaration on Munich. Whether this was really the case may perhaps become clear after the respective British archives have been opened to the public.

The 4 + 2 Conference ended on 12 September 1990 with the foreign ministers of the two German states, Great Britain, France, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the United States of America signing in Moscow the Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany where the outer borders of the two German states were considered as the outer borders of Germany. In relation to Poland, Germany committed itself to sign an agreement on the Oder-Neisse line. Consequently, the pre-Munich borders of Czechoslovakia were finally confirmed.

Thus, no declaration made by the German government, including the period since the reunification of Germany, has gone beyond the frame set by the 1973 Agreement. This applies also to the new Czechoslovak-German Agreement signed in Prague on 27 February 1992 which refers in relation to the Munich Agreement to the previous Agreement of 1973 on mutual relations between the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany, including *"the nullity of the Munich Agreement of 29 September 1938..."*[41]

The signing of the Czecho-German Declaration in Prague on 21 January 1997 did not produce any change in this matter,

[41] Jindřich Dejmek, Jan Kuklík, Jan Němeček, *Historické, právní a mezinárodní souvislosti dekretů prezidenta republiky* [Historical, legal and international implications of the President's decrees]. Medea Kultur, Praha 2003, doc. No. 17, p. 190.

either. The Declaration did not expressly mention the question of nullity of the Munich Agreement. According to the information leaking from the talks to the press the negotiations were far from being easy, namely in viewing the past. Finally, nevertheless, in the matter of Munich Agreement the Declaration remained limited to a general declaration in Point II according to which: *"The German side recognizes the responsibility of Germany for its role in the historical development that led to the Munich Agreement of 1938, to people fleeing and being expelled from the Czechoslovak border areas, and to the destruction and occupation of the Czechoslovak Republic."*[42]

Neither did the 70th anniversary of the Munich Agreement bring about any change in the German view of its nullity. In the last German declaration so far, namely that made by German Minister of Foreign Affairs Frank-Walter Steinmeier on 29 September 2008, Munich was referred to as a beginning of the end of old Europe and a lesson was drawn from it: *"Never more must it happen in Europe or in the whole world that states and nations are forced under the threat of using power to submit to foreign will. Instead of war and destruction we need peaceful collaboration in a unified and free Europe."* The declaration indicates that the German side after more than ten years since the Czecho-German Declaration still supports the point of view formulated in the 1973 Agreement.

It is obvious that the question of repudiation of the Munich Agreement by both Germany and Great Britain has become petrified in the formulations of 1973, or 1940 and 1942 and that neither country currently intends to reopen that question.

[42] *Ibid.*, doc. No. 18, p. 201.

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